ON THE MOUNTAIN TOP

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"OH, WHATEVER MADE US COME THIS WAY!" CRIED THE BOY.—*See p. 7.*

On The Mountain Top

By

Belle Kellogg Towne

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PREFACE.

"Each has his obstacles to overcome, his mountain to climb, and each aims to reach the top. But there is a difference in the way people climb. Some go sighing over hardships encountered, with shoulders bowed, and head drooping so low that the miasmas breathed make each step difficult. Others climb standing erect, with feet planted firmly, lungs filled with bracing air, a song in the heart, and eyes fixed upon the heights. The one grows weaker as he climbs, the other stronger. Which way will you climb?"

These words were spoken in these pages to a discouraged girl, who believed that her upward path was steeper and more stony than that by which others were climbing. She was inspired by friendly counsel to greater exertion in reaching heights presented to her. We trust there is helpfulness in these pages for other climbers who are striving to reach the mountain top.

In previous editions, this book—in deference to its publisher—appeared under the name "Around the Ranch." But its present publishers believe the true spirit of the book is better expressed by the title upon which the author's thoughts centered when weaving the story—"On the Mountain Top."

THE PUBLISHERS.

ON THE MOUNTAIN TOP.

By BELLE KELLOGG TOWNE.

CHAPTER I.

LEFT ON THE MOUNTAIN.

Two children stood in a wild rift broken in the mountain-side that was partially filled with a heterogeneous heap of boulders of all sizes, over which in the deepest place a small streamlet was making its way to a broader one which coursed at the foot of the mountain.

"I can't get down; I shall pitch head first." It was the boy who spoke, a slender lad standing on a pile of rocks a little above his companion—a girl a few years older. The wind flapped the brim of the boy's coarse straw hat, and the pleading eyes he turned upon the girl were weighted with tears.

"Yes, you can," said the girl; "see how I get along! Try, now."

"But I slip, the stones are so smooth," said the boy.

"You shouldn't wear shoes; that's what's the matter," said his companion.

"But the stones hurt so," replied the boy.

"Before I'd be such a baby!" was the girl's rather rough rejoinder. But at the same time she took a few steps backward and held her hand helpfully out to the lad, who was now making an attempt to scramble down to where she stood.

"That's right; come along! We can't get back, that's certain. See how tall that last rock is we slid down! We can't climb over that again, so we've just got to go ahead."

"But if we can't, we can't," said the boy with a sob. The next moment he turned white with fear, as, stepping upon a smooth stone, his foot slipped and sent him plunging forward, so that only by a series of dives was he saved from falling.

"There is no can't about it!" declared the girl, springing over two or three stones with the agility of a deer, thus placing some little distance between herself and companion.

"Oh, Deb, don't go and leave me! I'm coming!" cried the boy, as with frantic effort he stumbled on. But the girl, if she heard, made no sign of doing so, except a slight slacking of her speed.

It had seemed a simple feat to the children, the taking of a short cut home from the Chalk Cliffs, instead of following the wood road. "There's Cone Rock right over there," Deborah had said, pointing to a red and yellow sandstone rising apparently but little in advance of them, "and we know home is right at the foot of Cone Rock, with only the creek between; and father says the creek can be crossed anywhere now, it's so low." Hearing which, the tired boy, unaccustomed to mountain travel, had given his ready assent to the taking of a shorter route than the interminable road by which they had come.

But steeper and rougher the way grew, and foolishly they continued pushing along, until by jumps, slides and scrambles, they cut themselves entirely from retreat, as the more experienced eye of the girl discerned. The only way remaining was to press forward as long as it was possible for them to do so, though that would of course be much longer in the case of the girl, used all her life to the mountains, than the boy fresh from a city home. But the boy was braver-hearted than he looked, the girl tenderer-hearted. The one, as the danger thickened, choked down the sobs that he felt would betray his timidity; the other held in check her impetuous wish to press forward at all hazards, and, though seeming to take little notice of the one following, carefully kept only that distance between them which she thought necessary to spur on the boy's lagging steps. But finally they reached a place which caused even the girl's face to show signs of dismay, when, shut in so that the late afternoon sun had little power over the dark shadows, the rocks went perpendicularly down for so many feet that it was impossible to slide over them. Cautiously Deborah advanced to the edge and looked over, and then cast an eagle-like gaze around in every direction; at last she drew back.

"There's no going this way any further," she said.

"Oh, Deb! what if we never should get home!" And the lad, white with terror, caught convulsively at the girl's dress. To have Deb show signs of being vanquished took the last bit of hope from Dan.

"Now, Dan, if you bother me so that I can't think, I'll go and leave you."

"But you can't go; you said you couldn't!" cried the boy with a sob. "Oh, whatever made us come this way?" and now the tears toppled over the woe-begone face. The girl, looking upon the boy's grief, said in a softer way than was her wont:

"There, Danny, you don't want to cry; it's weakening-like. Of course I wouldn't have come this way if I had known, but now we're here we must make the best of it. I guess you'd better sit down while I see if we can't get around the rock someway."

The boy's weariness overcame his fear of being left alone, and sinking down, he allowed the girl to round a sharp rock and pass from sight.

It was only a few moments that he sat there with his eyes closed, leaning against the hard rock, waiting the re-appearance of his companion, but when he opened his eyes again and looked around, it seemed to him the darkness had thickened. He started to his feet with a sharp, frightened cry.

"Coming!" called the girl, evidently but a little way off; and soon she was beside him.

"Do you think we can get along?" Dan asked solicitously.

"Dunno; we can try. Have to take to the brook, I reckon."

"Take to what?"

"Oh, nothing; come along!"

Over among the rocks in this new direction the two scrambled. Sometimes as the boy hurried forward a stone rolling against his slender ankles would make him well nigh cry out in protest against going further; unused as he was to mountain travel, the hardships seemed of much greater magnitude than they really were.

"There!" said the girl at last, stopping to take breath, "this is as far as I came. There seems no chance to get along further except where the creek is. You'll have to off with your shoes and stockings." Having played for the last two days in a sunny brook back of his brother's cabin, the city boy had already acquired the knack of making quick work of dismantling his feet, and soon, with his shoes tied together by their strings, and his trousers rolled to his knees, he stood ready to step in after his guide. But the first plunge of his delicate feet into the water, fresh from under the snows of the mountains, and here in this deep rift unwarmed by sun-rays, made him cry out in dismay.

"Oh, Deb, I can't!" he said drawing back, and dropping upon the bank, a little heap of shrinking humanity.

The girl turned quickly. "What's the matter now?"

"Oh, it's so cold!" the boy answered shudderingly. "It goes clear through and through me."

"You're just a baby, and that's all there is to it," said the girl, her eyes kindling as they fell on the trembling boy; "I wish I'd never tried to make anything of you, I certainly do."

"Oh, Deb, don't!" pleaded the boy, with tears streaming down his face. "I'll go anywhere but there."

"You won't go anywhere if you don't go there—I can tell you that. You'll stay here all night, and you'll stay alone, too, for I sha'n't wait; I'm going home! I'd have been there long ago if it hadn't been for you a-bothering, and I just won't stay another minute; it's 'most dark now." And with these words the girl plunged her tough, tanned feet ankle deep into the ice-cold water. The boy stepped in gingerly after her, but again drew back at the first chilling touch. Fairly crimson was the girl's face when, turning, she saw her companion back upon the dry rocks again.

"Dan Deering! It's the meanest trick I ever had played on me! I'll never forget it of you as long as I live—your getting me caught this way! I was never out on the mountain all night in my life! The folks at home 'll be worried to death about us, and blaming me, and no telling what they won't think."

"If they only would come after us!" cried Dan, looking around on the gathering shadows.

"If they do, they'll never think of looking for us here; they'd follow along the wood-road, for that's the way we generally take from the Chalk Hills."

"Maybe they will," said Dan.

"They won't," answered Deb; "so if you don't want to stay here all night, you'd better come along. They say as how there's bears and mountain-lions up yonder," and she pointed to some thickly wooded peaks showing darkly against the gray sky. The boy gave one look in the direction indicated, and then stepped boldly into the stream. For a few rods the girl hurried forward, with the boy close at her heels, and then, as the increasing depth of the water and the roughness of the path necessitated the standing in one place longer

to pick out the way, the boy gave one sharp, quick "I can't! I won't!" and made for the shore again. Faint and white, he sat down upon the stones, and, dropping his shoes, took one of his feet into his hands and attempted warming it. There were no tears upon his face; he was beyond that. Without looking at the girl, who was standing stock still with a contemptuous look upon her face, he said, "Go on; you needn't wait."

"But I can't leave you there," answered the girl; "what would your brother say?"

"Go and get him; I'll stay here; I can't stand the water, but I can stay here and wait." And the boy's voice, save for a certain tension, showed little emotion.

"Are you dead sure I'd better?"

"Yes," said Dan, though a trifle more faintly. The pain in his feet was beginning to ebb now.

"Well, I'll get home as quick as I can. You must stay here right by this bend in the creek, so I'll know where to find you when we come back for you." Then starting forward, she turned back to say, "I was fooling about those bears and mountain-lions; they haven't seen any—oh—ever, as I know of," and sped along. Seeing how deftly she sprang from rock to rock, not minding in the least the water which had caused him such pain, the boy gave a long-drawn sigh.

Had a stranger at that moment looked upon the one in the distance, who with feet as brown as the stones themselves fearlessly made her way along, with the water gurgling around her, the wind that now swept through the gorge tossing the calico skirt from her wet ankles, and flinging out the tawny hair that hung long and lank from under a fur cap which, though midsummer, the strange girl preferred to "a hat catching on everything," and which set on her straightly held head like a raccoon curled on a gate-post, he would doubtless have thought her a very curious object on which to center one's hopes. And yet at that moment all the hope Danny Deering had in this wide world was centered there.

Once the object of his gaze turned and waved her hand, and then a sharp rock shut her from sight.

Having lived all his short life in the crowded city, with its din and commotion upon every side; having never seen a hill higher than a coasting ground, or an unoccupied space larger than a city park, what wonder that when by the death of his mother Daniel Deering was suddenly transplanted to the home of his bachelor brother, in the very heart of a mountainous region, he should feel as though entering upon a life different in every respect from anything ever dreamed of before? Had it not been for the kindness of the family living on the ranch next his brother's little hut, and the stirring though somewhat rough companionship of Deborah, the ranchman's only child, Dan would have found his lines cast in hard places—according to his way of thinking. But in one way and another, the days had passed by much more quickly and pleasantly than he at one time would have supposed possible; and, although they had made several short excursions into the mountains, this was the first to end in the least discomfiture.

As Deborah disappeared from sight, Dan, who had been mechanically drawing on his stockings and shoes, gave one glance around. At that moment the call of a bird rang sharply from the distance. He plunged his fingers into his ears, dropped his head into his lap, and strove, by thus shutting out sight and sound, to lose a realizing sense of his surroundings.

He pictured the little hut down under the frowning peaks, and his brother busy with the coming meal. Last evening his brother had said, "It's not so lonesome, now you're around, Dan." Was he lonely now? And—oh, would

he come in search of him? What if it should be dark when they came for him, and they should go by in the darkness!

In apprehension Dan started to his feet, and gazed around him to see how dark it really had become. The somber pines were swaying to and fro in the evening wind, filling the air with weird music, above which could now and then be heard the dropping of a last year's cone upon the dry needles so thickly strewing the mountain-side. As he stood looking about, the distant peaks in front of him were suddenly lit by a golden light thrown from the sun setting somewhere; the sight recalled the evening sun gilding the old church spire at home. A homesick wave swept over him; he broke into a low wail of anguish, and, throwing himself down among the drifted leaves, wept passionately. Weary, jaded, and overwrought, the flood-gates once opened, it was well-nigh impossible to command energy enough to close them again; it was easier to weep than not to weep; so the boy wept on until sleep came to

the rescue, and folded him in blessed unconsciousness

And how of the one who had started homeward? Used as she was to roughing it from babyhood, never before had she been caught in a strait like this. The creek left, over the rough way she went, leaping and sliding, and often making progress by very force of will. With each moment that passed her heart grew stormier toward the boy who had proved such a dire hindrance to her.

"He's a chicken-hearted silly, and I'll leave him alone after this, I will! To think that he had rather stay there than to put his feet in cold water—and he a boy at that! I'll get home somehow, see if I don't!"

And from appearances she seemed in a fair way so to do, though whether she was likely to carry back as much of her dress as she had started with was slightly to be doubted.

It was in the early edge of evening that the light streamed over Deb, as she entered her own home.

"Well," said her mother, turning from setting a kettle over the fire, "we've been about distracted—that is, Dorman Deering has. He and your father have just gone with a lantern up the wood-road to hunt for you."

"Get your horn. They're going wrong; he ain't there."

"You don't pretend to say Danny's not with you?"

"But he wouldn't come. I couldn't get him to, 'cause the water was so cold. We got lost in the gorge and couldn't get down without following in the creek. He wouldn't do that, so I had to come on to get Dorm to go after him."

With a decisive step the mother turned, and, taking down a horn, passed to the door and sent her voice out along the rocky way.

"If anything should happen, Deb, Dorman'd never forgive you!"

"He may take care of the youngster himself, for all of me," said the girl sullenly, dropping into a chair and tossing off her cap; "I'd have been home long ago if it hadn't been for him a-hindering so."

"You look all beat out," said the mother. "You'd better hurry with your supper; you'll have to go back, I s'pose, to show them the way."

"I'm half dead," said Deb.

"But I don't see how you came to get in the gorge; I thought you never came that way from the cliffs."

"I thought we'd got below it, and Dan's such a slow walker I tried to shorten the way for him."

This was a little unfair in Deborah, for had it not been for the love of hunting agates that had kept her lingering on the Chalk Cliffs much longer than the prescribed time, and a lurking wish to show her independence to her companion, she doubtless would not have departed from the accustomed way.

"Are you sure you can find the way back to him?" asked the mother, as she cut another thick slice of bread.

"Yes, if he don't stir. He's right in a bend of the creek that I shall know."

Taking the horn again, the mother sent her voice for a second time along the cliffs. This time a faint answer came in return.

"It would be awful for him to be out all night, as Johnny Wiley was, and he so delicate," said Mrs. Gibbs, replacing the horn.

Deb made no answer; she was fully occupied with the claims of appetite.

Soon the two men made their appearance, and the recital had to be gone through with again. Dorman Deering listened in silence; when it was done he laid his hand kindly on the girl's shoulder and said:

"It's a hard day you've been having with the little chap, I fear, but"—and his voice dropped—"if he had a mother he wouldn't be bothering so, you know."

The words so unexpected—for words came slow to Dorman Deering—touched Deb and gave her fresh strength to take the cap and jacket her mother held out to her, and stand in readiness for the return trip as soon as a fresh bit of candle could be placed in the tin lantern.

"If you could tell us the place, you wouldn't need to go," Dorman said.

"She'd better go," said the mother; "and then if anything should happen we'd feel we'd done all we could."

"Tut!" said her husband, "there ain't nothing going to happen; but I 'low as how Deb better go along."

Into the darkness they went, a little fleck of light across the dead black night.

Down among the leaves and cones they found him, numb and cold, and dead with

sleep, but otherwise seeming none the worse for what he had been through. As with his arms around his brother's neck, he was borne down the mountain-side, he said, with his soft cheek pressed tight against the rougher one, "You'll 'most wish I hadn't come bothering."

"Hush, lad! we have you back now," and the elder brother's voice was husky. Then in a moment he added in a cheery tone:

"The coals will be done red, as you like them best, I'm thinking."

The coals were indeed done red, when, after bidding the others good-night, the two entered the little adobe hut. They lay in a shining heap upon the hearthstone of the rude fireplace, lighting the room with a soft glow.

"I didn't know how nice it was here," Dan said, rubbing his benumbed hands; for even in summer the nights here in the mountains were filled with chill. To tell the truth, little Dan had not entertained heretofore the most flattering opinion of his brother's modest quarters, but would it be the same ever again?

In answer to what Dan had said about its looking nice in the room, Dorman only laid his hand against the cheek of the lad for an instant, and then he rolled the table, already spread for the evening meal, closer to the fire.

"Get warm as soon as you can, sonny. We'll soon have you tucked in under the blankets as comfortable as can be."

Swinging the sputtering teakettle to one side, he poured some of its steaming contents into a little Black Bet of a teapot, and uncovering the potatoes from their warm bed of ashes, pronounced supper ready.

"And you won't forget, Dorm?" said the fair-haired boy, coming to where his brother was seated at the table, and looking up wistfully into his face.

"What, Dan?"

"How good God's been to us to-night. It was awful out on the mountain."

To which Dorman made answer:

"Yes, lad."

But whether in assent to the awfulness of the mountain, or as a promise that he would not forget, Dan did not know; but he stole quietly around to his place at the little pine table without more words.

CHAPTER II.

NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

IT WAS the morning after his escape from the mountain that Daniel Deering sat with his chin resting upon his arms, which were crossed over the sill of the one little window of his brother's cabin. The room did not look as cheery as when on the previous night its glow contrasted suddenly with the darkness without. The ashes left from the breakfast fire were dying into a dead white on the bricks paving the fireplace; the pine table and pine chairs and rough miner's bedstead looked mean in the broad glare of the morning sun, and the few books upon the swing-shelf, with their well-thumbed pictures, had no power to attract. The magpies in their slat cage outside the window called to one another, and at times stretched their heads around to catch sight of the boy by the window, as though to question his right to be there. But Dan cared not even to make the effort of answering back, much less that of rising to find a tidbit for them, as he had done on former occasions. Stiff from his day of tramping and night of exposure, every movement was twice counted before ventured; and for one so young, life was full heavy to be borne.

Outside the door, the cottonwoods, dressed in their summer glory, swayed their leaves in the fresh morning air, creating music like distant chimes; but Dan heard it not. Sick at heart, and too listless to rouse and drive thoughts of home and mother from him, he lay with his head pillowed upon his arm, and the tears forming little pools on the oaken window sill. At last he rose.

"I shall die here!" he said, looking round on the comfortless room. "Only six days, and it seems years!" And then he threw himself down on a soap-box by his brother's bed, and

pressing his face against the patchwork quilt. stroked it lovingly. Why should he not! It was the very one he and his mother had pieced in the little kitchen at home—pieced for Dorman out in the mountains, to make him think of home. And now how it made Dan out in the mountains think of home!—bits of the very dresses he had seen his mother wear day after day. How they called her up to him, with her quiet, loving ways! And how bare the life lived here seemed in contrast, with his brother gone all day to the mine, and he left to do—what? It seemed to Dan as though he could never rise from the awful dullness into actual life again.

As he sat thus a sharp whistle sounded from without. Was it the magpies? Dan thought not. He started to his feet, and darting to the pine shelf where stood the wash-basin, hastily plunged his face into the water. He shrank from having Deb Gibbs catch him in tears; once she had done so, and her raillery had not caused a pleasant sensation to the sensitive boy. Dan was rubbing his face vigorously with the rough towel when the door opened.

"Oh, you're here, are you?" Deb said, just thrusting in her head; "you're not going to stay here all day?"

Dan was far from knowing what he did intend doing all day, but he muttered something about not feeling very well.

"Mother said as how you'd be sick to-day. I've got Rolly and Towley with me, if you want;" and, coming into the room, the girl displayed two little sharp noses protruding one from each of her apron pockets.

The boy said nothing, and, scooping into her pockets, Deb took out the owners of the sharp noses, and put them down upon the rough floor. A moment they stood looking around, as though to get their bearings, and then off like a rocket went one, and the other after him.

"Towley always will tag," said Deb, laughing merrily; "I'd defy Rolly to get ahead of him."

As she spoke, the foremost of the two ran up a chair-back, and the other, looking longingly, gave a jump and landed upon Dan's shoulder.

"Oh, take him off! Take him off!" exclaimed the boy shudderingly. "I can't bear for him to touch me."

The girl's face clouded.

"Here, Towley," she called, "he can't bear you, he says;" and she transferred her favorite to her own shoulder.

Dan felt that he had lowered himself suddenly in the girl's regard, and he tried to rectify his mistake.

"You see, I ain't used to them," he said apologetically; "maybe I'd like them if I got used to them."

"Got used to them!" said the girl scornfully. "I shouldn't think Rolly and Towley 'd need getting used to! Mrs. Cline said she'd give ten dollars for 'em if she could get 'em home. She didn't think she needed to get used to 'em."

"But I never saw any such little foxes before," said Dan excusingly.

"Suppose you didn't—you never saw me before either, did you? Come, Rolly!" And picking up the second fox, she deposited him in her pocket and marched away.

"I say, Deb!" called Dan after her.

"Well?" she answered, without turning.

"Dorm says I've got a splendid agate among the stones I found yesterday."

Deb half stopped.

"You can have it if you want."

Deb slipped Towley, whom she had been carrying, into her other pocket, and, turning, came back.

"Let me see it," she said.

Dan ran into the house, and, taking down a little bag that had once been a marble-bag, came out to where Deb was now sitting on a stump in front of the door, and emptied its contents into her lap.

"There!" said he, selecting one stone from its fellows; "Dorm says that's a beauty."

Deb took the stone and examined it critically. Love of agates was well-nigh a passion with this girl, and so fine a collection had she succeeded in obtaining, that she could hardly see a good stone in another's keeping without coveting it.

"You can have it if you like, Deb," said Dan hesitatingly, not sure that she thought it as fine a specimen as did his brother.

"Did Dorman tell you to give it to me?" Deb asked, throwing a side-look upon the boy.

"No," said Dan, not knowing whether Deb would rather have it that way or some other.

"What makes you, then?" she asked, rattling the stones from one hand to the other.

"Why—because I want to," said Dan, with a slight hesitancy.

"But I tease you," said Deb, looking up; "you don't like me very well."

"Maybe I will when I know you better," Dan said, flushing.

The girl poured back all the stones into the bag, and rising, handed it to Dan.

"I reckon I'd better be hurrying; I'm going over to the Cliff House."

Was it by chance the statement was made, or was it designed to tantalize Dan? If so, he was not aware of it, but stood swinging round and round by its cotton cord the little bag of treasures. As the girl moved away he said:

"Won't you take the agate, Deb?"

"I don't take things from them as don't like me very well," she said stoically, moving away.

"But, Deb, I must like you! You're all I have to like, except Dorm;" and his lip quivered.

The girl stopped, and for a second looked down upon the boy questioningly. Finally she laughed a laugh that showed her small white teeth and made her face attractive.

"Dan Deering, you're the strangest fellow I ever saw! I'd get mad at you, only I can't. Give your agate here, and get your hat and come along; father said we'd better get our eggs fixed first, and then watch our chance for a ride. It's jolly going to the Cliff House; you won't get a chance every day."

Hurriedly selecting the stone, Dan darted away, and, tossing the bag into the middle of the bed, he snatched his hat, taking a peep into the six-inch glass to see that there was nothing greatly amiss about him. Then, simply swinging to the door, as was the custom here, he was back by Deb's side, chatting merrily. The getting out from under the cloud of his new companion's displeasure was a great relief to Dan.

It was not until the eggs had been gathered and packed into a basket, and, having made her locks wondrous smooth, and supplanted the cap by a black straw hat, while her feet had succumbed to the strange environments of shoes, that Deb, sitting on a log by the roadside, with Dan beside her, waiting for some wagon to pass and pick them up, entered into a more minute account of their destination.

"You see, the folks at Cliff House can't get enough of fresh eggs, and they like mother to send them down some whenever she can; it's jolly down there, I can tell you! The piano a-going, and the carriages a-rolling up, and such sights of folks dressed in their best; you'll think this a big day, I can tell you." Deb was hardly counting on Dan's being acquainted with the gay life money makes in the city; not that he had ever mingled in it, but even a poor boy becomes accustomed to the glitter and the shine when his home is there.

Curled down in Farmer Lane's big wagon, with the basket between them, and plenty of straw beneath them, the two children were taken over the road lying between the ranch and the summer hotel perched among the cliffs a few miles from the village beyond. The Cliff House was a fashionable summer resort for a large section of the surrounding country, and now in the mid-season was swarming with gayety and fashion.

The children, having been dropped in the main road, made their way up the carefully rolled drive, and as, coming out in front of the gayly decorated building, the music of falling fountain and gay laughter fell over them, Dan stood still; was this fairyland, or was it home again?

"You mustn't stand here," said Deb; "the folks will all be looking at us: come on, we've got to go round to the back door."

"Oh, Deb, let me stay here, it's so nice!" said Dan beseechingly. "I'll sit down here and no one'll notice me;" and he dropped down on a rustic seat, one bower of wild clematis in tangled bloom. Deb glanced around, and, seeming to see no particular objection, passed on with her basket of eggs.

Hardly conscious of her departure, Dan sat drinking in the scene which reminded him so of the past and his loved city parks. The wooded grounds stretching out in front were peopled by gayly robed figures, some reclining on rustic seats, and others strolling leisurely through the shaded walks; while on the side balcony, of which Dan could just catch a glimpse, were maids in white caps and broad-frilled, white aprons, with crowing babies in charge, while older children romped merrily.

"And so near to up there, too!" Dan murmured at last, heaving a long-drawn sigh as he thought of the bare hut with its sod roof, but a little way up the mountain.

A child with a stick for a horse came racing along the walk, stopped to gaze at Dan, stubbed his toe and fell heavily to the ground. A terrified cry of "Mamma! mamma!" brought with swift feet a lady even before Dan had fairly picked up the fallen child. As the lady came, he handed out the screaming boy, saying:

"I didn't think, ma'am."

"Why, what did you do?" asked the lady, sitting down in Dan's vacated seat, taking the child upon her lap, and patting him deftly to hush his cries.

"My foot was too far out, I guess," said Dan.

"Oh," said the lady, looking at Dan from head to foot. "You are not stopping here?" she asked, taking in perhaps his rather oddly arranged dress—there were no mother-fingers now to straighten things for Dan.

"No; farther up the mountain," said Dan, holding down a branch of the starry clematis to attract the child's attention.

"Not for long, I should say," said the lady with a little laugh, as she noticed the fairness of the boy's complexion, so different from the sunburned mountaineers she had encountered in her rambles.

"No, not long; only six days: but it seems long."

There was a weight bearing down to sadness the words Dan spoke, and "It seems long" smote upon his listener's ear. She looked more closely at the one beside her.

"Is not your mother here?" she asked; and then by the trembling of the lad's lips she had her answer, and wished she had not asked the question. But only for a moment did the little stranger give any sign that the words had hurt. Straightening and throwing back his head slightly, he said:

"My mother's dead, ma'am. But Dorman, he's here."

"Is the one you speak of your brother?" asked the lady, now really interested.

"Yes. He's all I have—except Deb; she's gone in with the eggs."

Just here the subject of remark appeared.

"Come on," she said; and then, catching sight of the lady, she stopped awkwardly, and stood swinging her basket.

"And who's this?" asked the lady, looking smilingly at the new-comer.

"Deb," said Dan; "she's the one who lives near Dorm's."

"Oh, yes; and brings the eggs, you say." Turning to Deb, she said: "You see, we two are getting acquainted. Have you lived in the mountains long?"

"Always," said Deb, kicking the ground with the toe of her shoe.

"Then you must know a good deal about the country; are there any nice places for people to visit near where you live?"

"There's the Chalk Cliffs; most folks like to hunt agates there. And there's Cone Rock, where they dig out the big bones: there's

"I'LL TELL DORMAN EVERY WORD YOU SAY!"

men from a Philadelphia college digging now. They're getting out a monster. Then there's Cañon Cave; everybody 'most goes there," said Deb, feeling quite at home, now the conversation had taken this turn.

"And how far is it?" asked the lady.

"It's four miles home, and then it's five miles to the Cave, and the Chalk Hills are two; but Cone Rock and the bone bed's right near to our house."

"But where is it you live?" asked the questioner, as she saw the girl show indications of moving on.

"It's the Gibbs Ranch; anyone can tell you where that is. Come on, Dan!"

"Well, we'll see," said the lady. "Good-by!" And so the children passed again on their way.

"Oh, ain't she nice!" exclaimed Dan, as soon as they had passed on out of hearing.

"There's lots of such folks 'round in the summer-time; the mountains are full of them. The men don't like 'em much, they're such hands to ask questions; but they're good to get nickels out of. I sold a man all my specimens one year: got nearly five dollars for them. I'm saving up again; somebody'll want them."

"What do they want them for?"

"Oh, to take home; shows they've been here, you know. I guess there's a team coming." And looking along the road, which they had now gained, the children saw a cloud of dust, and the next moment a wagon came rattling along toward them.

"I should think you'd hate to ride with folks you don't know," said Dan.

"Ho! I know most of 'em."

"Do you know this one?"

"I know the team; it's the pickle-man's. It's all right."

"The whose?"

"The pickle-man's. He brings pickles to our house every year," said Deb; and then, as a high, blue wagon drew near, she called out to the individual driving, "Can we ride?"

"Gibbs' gal, ain't it?" came in reply, as the horses were partially brought to a stand.

"Yes," answered Deb.

"All right; in with you." And the children climbed over the end of the wagon-box.

There was no straw here, and, not caring to share the driver's seat—the front edge of the wagon-box—they took up their quarters upon the bare boards, which they found rather jolty, to say the least. But the girl was used to roughing it, and the boy's thoughts had taken such breadth of flight that nothing had power to annoy just now. So along the road they went, the noise of the wagon over the rough way making conversation well-nigh impossible, even had they desired to talk—a thing Dan at present cared little for, preferring to sit in silence and hug the delicious thought that near—so near—it was like home.

On the whole, it was a very different little face that went in at the door of the hut under the cliffs, from the one that had rested on the oaken window-sill but a few hours previously, and wondrously light was the heart beating under the lad's well-worn jacket.

On pushing open the door, what was Dan Deering's surprise to find the room occupied: a man, rough-bearded and in his shirt-sleeves, was seated at the table, with a foot sprawled to each end of it, and was in the act of sending a big-bladed knife under a thick wedge of bread as Dan entered. For a moment the boy stood silent with astonishment, and then, as he saw the remainder of last night's beans emptied upon the intruder's plate, and bountifully spread with mustard, purloined, like the beans, from the little corner cupboard, resentment took possession of him.

"For so quiet a chap," his mother used to affirm, "Dan beats all for getting mad quick." And now his anger flamed up.

"I'd like to know what you think you're doing with my brother's beans!" he said, with hand upon the door—not seeming to care, for all his boldness, to go any further into the room.

"Eatin' on 'em," was the short rejoinder, as the man reached for the butter.

"I don't believe my brother 'll like your being here," said Dan.

"And maybe he likes your being here!" said the man, turning to the boy with a leer that contained more insult than the words.

"I'll tell Dorman every word you say," muttered Dan, turning. But before his foot was lifted for retreat, the man stretched forward, and down like a twenty-pounder came his hand on Dan's shoulder.

"Look you a-here, lad,"—and his voice was like low, growling thunder—"you lie low: don't you so much as peep when I'm around."

And with one or two waves of his great hand, Dan was given such a shaking as set his teeth chattering and his eyes starting from their sockets.

The man withdrew his hand, but as though rooted to the spot stood Daniel. The last shake had left him facing the little room, rather than the open door, else he might have summoned the courage to leap into the open air and freedom; as it was, he stood gazing in front of him, while not a hair upon his head stirred. The little round-faced clock from its hook by the head of the bed ticked away as though not in the least disturbed by what had happened. Only one o'clock! What would the man do next? Would he stay all day? Would he lay his hand upon him again as he passed out, or wouldn't he pass out? Would he ever drain the flask which out from the corners of his eyes Dan could see was tipped up at nearly every mouthful? Would Deb or Mrs. Gibbs or anybody come? or would he have to stand there until Dorm came? Five hours before Dorman would be there—the clock said so; and Dan counted it off, standing there with his knees ready to double up under him—what if they should, and he fall; would the man give him a kick? At that moment Deb's clear whistle sounded. It was coming nearer. Oh, joy! Was ever anyone so glad before to hear anything as Daniel Deering that whistle!

CHAPTER III.

BILL.

"HELLO! So you're 'round again!" was Deborah's greeting, as her eyes fell upon the intruder.

"Shut up!" was the man's answer, as he drained the last drop from the flask.

"Whisky run low, I reckon!" were the girl's next words. She had not entered, but merely thrust her head in at the window, leaning upon the sill, her hair falling over her shoulders, and the strange summer headgear tilted far over her forehead.

"Oh, come away!" said Dan, plucking at her dress, having gained courage at Deb's approach to clear the doorway, and stand again in the open air. But Deborah seemed bent on courting an adventure, and paid little heed to the boy's entreaties.

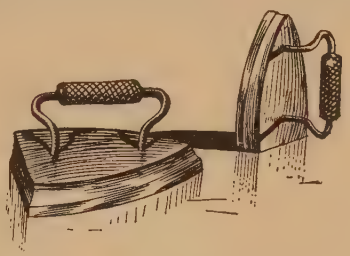
"Rather extra dry, ain't you, Bill?" she asked, as the man, having replenished the flask, began upon a new round.

"You clear out!" said the man; and his shaggy mane shook threateningly, without his head being turned toward the window.

"Seems to me I wouldn't be so touchy," said Deborah.

Quick as a flash an empty dipper was sent skimming in the direction of the girl's head, but quicker than a flash the head dodged, and the dipper buried itself in the squash vines beyond.

"Oh, Deb, do come!" cried Dan in the most abject terror, as his reckless companion paused to peer in at the open door as she passed. But she was taken no further notice of by the man, who was busy now placing the remnants of his repast back in the cupboard.



"Who is he, Deb?" Dan asked, as soon as they were far enough from the cabin to make the question safe.

"Nobody but Bill Ewyn! He's here off and on."

"But I'd like to know what business he has with Dorm's things."

"More Bill's things than Dorm's, I reckon," said Deb.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing. Come along! I'm going up to Aunt Martha's for the flatirons, and you better come; only I won't be pestered with a string of questions." And she broke into a swinging trot hard for Dan to keep up with.

It was not so short a time that they were gone, however, that Deb escaped a scolding for the time she had taken in bringing the needed irons, and when Mrs. Gibbs felt in the humor for scolding, she generally felt in the humor for setting Deborah to work; so, though Dan hung around, he gained little by doing so, save that when he was there he was not in a worse place—his brother's kitchen, for instance, with Bill Ewyn there too. Dan had had no noontide meal; Bill's monopoly of the provisions had prevented that, and his breakfast with his brother had been an early one; still he did not think about being particularly hungry. But when late in the afternoon Mrs.

Gibbs took from the oven the last of her delicately browned loaves of bread, the fifth, Dan noticed that it smelled good; better, in fact, than he remembered bread to have ever smelled before. Perhaps it was his standing with his eyes riveted upon it, that prompted Mrs. Gibbs to cut a generous slice from the earliest baked loaf, and, after spreading it

thickly with moist brown sugar, to hand it to him across the ironing-table. Daniel declared he was not in the least hungry, but when it was pressed upon him, there seemed nothing for him to do but take it; and he was rather glad, after all, to do so.

After it was eaten, sitting upon the frame of the grindstone just opposite the Gibbs' door, Dan was surprised to see how much better he felt. He was able to straighten up for another good square look at the world. He was half a mind to go down and lay the fire ready for supper. Once he had done so, and had hauled up brush for the breakfast fire as well, and his brother had seemed pleased; but suddenly remembering who was in the hut, Dan decided to defer a like exploit until a future time. And so he sat swinging his feet, while the sun sank lower behind the cliffs, and the shadows crept out to say another day was drawing to a close.

At last Dan slipped down and stole quietly to the cabin. He found his brother had already come; the fire was kindled, and the bacon frying for supper. The stranger's ungainly form towered beside the hearth, and his long legs seemed to take up half the room the hut afforded. Dan slipped along to the bunk under the window, with the scared feeling around his heart tightening again.

No one seemed to notice him. The room was filled with smoke from Bill's pipe—what a mean little room it was, anyway, with its one tallow dip and rough, unhewn logs! Very free from happy thoughts now was the heart under the worn jacket, and a discontented look crept into Dan's eyes as he sat there hearing the bacon sizzling in the spider, but feeling shut out and alone. Once as Dorman passed on his way to the cupboard, he laid his hand upon his brother's head, and the pressure was almost a caress. Even as the boy looked up the hand was gone, and nothing in Dorman's face betokened consciousness of the act: but it looked worn and jaded—a very different face from the one Dan had parted with in the morning, when the magpies had peeped their good-by, and Dorman had said: "A good day to you, lad."

Would there ever come another good day to him? And almost a sob rose in his throat. The pressure of his brother's hand had made Dan tender-hearted, and, looking into Dorman's face, he was sorry that he had not laid the evening fire.

It was a stiff sort of meal, that supper under the sod-roof. Bill Ewyn, with his head nearly touching his plate, ate as though it was the first time he had seen food that day; and so absorbed was he that he seemed not to notice that the others were not eating. Perhaps it was the slice of bread and sugar on the grindstone which caused the low ebb of Dan's appetite, but that could not have been the case with the elder brother, and he ate even less than the younger one. All Dorman seemed to care for was to keep the coffee-pot between Dan and the tin flask—which at the last moment their visitor had placed upon the table—and to divert Dan's attention whenever it was raised to its owner's lips.

At best it was a constrained meal, and Dan was glad when at last it was ended, and, the table being cleared, he was at liberty to betake himself to the bunk and draw the army blanket up over his head. He would shut every unpleasant thought from him, and retain only the ones he cared to think about. And his lips there under the covering went together as tightly as did his eyes.

Systematically Dan began to call up the earlier events of the day that the later ones had crowded out: Who was the lady he had seen under the starry clematis? How blue were her eyes, and how very pink her fingernails! Was the little boy hers? Yes; he had called her "mamma," and she had come in answer to the call. What was such a life like as the ones at the Cliff House lived?

Dan was lying perfectly still, his feet crossed one upon the other, and his hands clasped over his chest. Like a panorama, all that he had seen that morning passed again before him—the flying flags from the little dormer windows; the falling fountain shimmering in the sunshine, and breaking in spray over pink-lined shells and green vines; the happy faces of children; the flutter of gay dresses; the luxurious carriages. Each and all came back to fill the boy's senses with a rare thrill of delight. Right in upon these visions came the words:

"Send him to the mines!"

Dan's heart gave one throb, and then with tingling expectancy he waited for the answer. It came—only two words—but they set the heart bounding once more:

"Too young."

How Dan could have hugged Dorman for those words! The tears welled to the widely-strained lids and threatened to overflow them. In his relief Dan turned more upon his side, but the movement was unnoticed by the two men holding converse beside the dying embers. Under the blanket roofing his bunk Dan lay,

as motionless as before, but there were no rosy visions holding him entranced now. On the contrary his mind was sweeping forward, trying to lay hold of what might be waiting for him in the future.

"Looks rather as though he thought there would come a time for me to go when I get older!" Dan muttered, thinking of the words "too young." He kicked the clothes. Was that what it was coming to — work in the mines? He would rather die right there, without waiting for the morning, than to have that come—yes, he was sure of it! The damp, dark mines, with the water trickling down in places and making the clay stick to the feet like the soil around a grave, on a damp day. Daniel could only remember standing by one grave, but he had stood by that upon a rainy day, and the remembrance had come up before him as he followed on after Dorman the day he visited the mine. Dan had refrained from acquainting his brother with his feelings the day he took him to visit the place where he worked, but he had determined never to go again—never!—if he could help it.

Such a life for himself had not crossed Dan's mind, as he stood watching the dusky figures at their work, but as soon as Bill dropped the words, he knew to whom they referred. And now his brother's reply, "too young," only half satisfied him. He closed his eyes, but as often as he did so they flew open again. So there he lay, a target for whatever might come that way. For a time the men's voices ran lower, and only occasionally did a word strike upon Dan's ear. But presently Bill's voice rose, and his words came thick and fast, and Dan felt the drowsiness just falling over him take wings.

"I tell you, Dorm Deering, if you think I'm going to have any foolin' about this thing you're mistaken; that's all! When you said as how you'd got to send for the boy, and couldn't spare last month more'n enough to git him here, why, I didn't say nothin' 'gainst it. But now he's here, 'n' I guess as how you ha'n't been to no great expense gittin' on him here, nuther, from what I hearn tell about the lifts he had; and so you've just got to knuckle down to terms agin! It was fifteen dollars every blessed month till the thing's paid. And one month, mind you, 's gone by without nothin' bein' paid, and anuther's 'most here, and you needn't calkerlate on anything answering then but the money down for them two months, or my name ain't Bill Ewyn! If you're likely to be hard up, send the boy to the mines to work; and the quicker he's got there the better. If you can't git ten dollars a month out of him I can; and his keep won't cost me that, nuther." And here Bill gave a gruff laugh that made Dan tingle from head to foot.

"Why don't Dorm knock him down!" and Dan clinched his fist defiantly and raised a corner of the blanket for a breathing-hole.

But evidently Dorman was inclined to no such thing, for though Dan could see nothing, with his back to the men, the measured tread of his brother across the room, and the click of the dipper-handle against its nail, proclaimed the fact that he had only risen for a drink of water.

"'Knuckle down!' I'd like to see myself do it to Bill Ewyn!" and Dan again kicked the clothes. The next moment he felt the presence of someone by his bed, and his brother spoke in a low tone:

"Dan?"

Getting no response from the lad, Dorman turned away, and the next that Daniel heard was the winding of the clock. Soon after, by the creaking of the bed, he knew the two were at rest. He threw back the blankets and lay staring into the darkness. Slowly he went back over the words Bill Ewyn had spoken, and some of them burned into his brain like coals of fire. Why did not Dorman pitch him out and be done with him? Then came the words Deborah had spoken out in the squash-vines: "More Bill's things than Dorm's!" Were they? Could this be true? Dan turned uneasily upon the narrow bunk. What business had such a one as Bill to know all about his coming? Why had Dorman got in debt to such a man! But even after all this had been brought up and laid down, Dan was not at rest. Did boys as young as he work in the mine? Yes. He remembered now it was a boy with a light in his hat that had stopped them the day they were at the mine to tell them not to go further, as they were going to blast. While they were talking Dan had looked him squarely in the face: their heads were even. The boy was as small as he—poor Dan!

It was late when Daniel opened his eyes the next morning on his bit of the universe; but what was spanned by his vision as he lay thinking he would rise, and not rising, seemed not so very dreary as perhaps he expected after the previous night's happenings. Over the fire, which evidently had been well supplied with fuel at an earlier hour, the iron teakettle sputtered as though impatient because no one was utilizing its steaming contents; while on the hot bricks below, the coffee-pot sent forth a fragrant odor, filling the room with a homey atmosphere. In the center of the cabin stood the small table, from which the soiled dishes and remnants of an earlier breakfast had been removed, while Dan's plate rested upon a clean crash towel—a great concession to gentility here at Dorman Deering's home, where a tablecloth had never been thought necessary heretofore. And what was that bumpy thing his plate tried to cover but did not? Dan rose at once to investigate. It was wrapped in "store" paper, and had the air of being well tied up which belongs only to packages tied by experienced hands. Without waiting to dress, Dan took the carving-knife and cut the string, a pleasant thrill of expectancy running through him; more of a pleasant one than he had ever expected to feel again after last night. How good it did seem not to have Bill there! He looked round to

make sure that he really had the house to himself. Yes, even Dorm's dog Jasper was not there.

The string cut and the paper loosened, out rolled a rubber ball; just such a one as Dan had often seen in the store windows, with one half as red as a red rose, and the other as white as a snowdrift. Dan gave the ball a hard throw upon the oaken floor. Like a thing of life, it bounded lightly up, touched the rough beams overhead, touched again the floor, and, bounding back, dropped into the boy's waiting hand. It was almost like having something with human life respond to him. He pressed it for a moment against his cheek, then, laying it back beside his plate, began to dress.

About eleven of that same day, as Daniel stood bounding his ball against the outside of the hut, he looked a fair type of a happy-hearted boy; but his looks as he stood there, the breeze blowing aside his light hair and tossing its ends into mimic curls, belied him: he was far from either happiness or light heartedness. With the dull monotony of the day shutting in around him again, the full bitterness of the previous night settled back.

"I just wish Bill Ewyn'd keep away from here," he murmured, bounding his ball with force. And then came the thought, Did Dorman owe Bill a real debt? If so, shouldn't it be paid? How hard his mother had worked to keep free from every indebtedness! "We must keep our honor clean at all hazards." How often he had heard his mother say that! In their straitened circumstances, it seemed to Dan as though he had heard something of the kind every day of his past life. "If only Bill was a nice man like Mr. Glenn"—the one they used to get groceries of—"it wouldn't be such hard work; maybe I'd go to the mines and help Dorm then."

A shout from the road caused Dan to look around. A man in a wagon was beckoning him, and Dan ran to the rail fence. "Here's Dorman's paper that I fetched him. There's a letter inside that they said as how belonged here—yours, I reckon." And giving the paper a toss, the man drove on.

Dan picked up the paper that had fallen near, and a small white envelope fell out—or rather one that had been white at some preious stage of its existence, but which now showed countless marks of soiled fingers. But only his own name written in a schoolboy's hand, did he see. Under the sumac bushes growing in a tangle along the fence, Dan dropped, and, tearing open the envelope, read:

DEAR DAN: It seems an age since you left, and mother thinks how likely's not it seems as long to you, and that I had better not wait to hear from you before writing. Your mother's roses are all open. Mother's going to press some of them to send you. Old Skinner's taken your house, and his Sarah's keeping house for him. The curtain you left over the hall door is the only thing about the house that looks as it did when you had it. Mother's down to Will's. They've got a baby there, and mother's there half of the time. They've named it James after me. But I don't know as I care much. It's an awful homely thing, with no nose at all. But mother says that I was every bit as bad-looking once, so I presume it'll turn out all right. Mother told me to tell you that you mustn't go to getting rough out there in the mountains, but that it's the same world there as here, and that one can grow up into a good man wherever he is if he only tries.

"That's just because they don't know. They don't know anything about it!" and Dan cut the air with his letter as he gesticulated angrily. "There's nothing to make folks good here. They don't know Bill Ewyn; they don't know how bare and mean it is here, and how there's nothing for folks to do but go to the mines. I hate it! I hate it all! I wish I had never come!"

Dan wrapped the letter around his face and wept bitterly—more so than he had ever done before in all his life. When at last he raised his head, the first thing his eyes rested upon was his ball lying at his feet in all its fresh red-and-white beauty. He reached and took it up with a repentant little heart-beat. And as he did so he seemed to see his brother's eyes as they sometimes looked, full of yearning tenderness.

Where had Dorman got the ball? Had he sent to the village for it by some of the miners? Had he thought of his brother's happiness even when away at work? Dan picked up the newspaper, and with it and his letter and ball returned to the house. Later he finished reading the letter; but there was little more of interest in it, save that all his old playfellow Jimmie Stiles wrote was of interest. Daniel had no wish to be with Deborah that day. Too many old associations had been awakened, too many unanswered questions had taken up their abode within him, to make him feel other than an uncertain longing to run back to the old place and Mrs. Stiles, and let things here in the mountains go on without him.

When Dorman returned at night he was surprised to find that the new ball had not fulfilled its mission of making his brother happy.

"It's a fine ball, Dorm," Daniel said, trying to give his brother an open look.

"But if it's not fine to you, lad—" Turning, Dorman took down the water pail from its shelf and passed out.

Dan watched him make his way through the wild gooseberry bushes to the spring, and he felt his heart beat quickly—just as it used to in the old days when his mother, reproving him for something that he had failed to do, would ask: "And do you hope to make a good man that way, Daniel?"

CHAPTER IV.

CANYON CAVE.

"CAN you tell us where the Gibbs' ranch is?"

"A mile ahead on the right. That rock yonder is just back of it."

"Thank you. Good-morning!"

"Good-day to you!"

The light wagon with its gay load passed one

way, the farm wagon with its single occupant, the other.

"I don't see the use of going so far to get a girl for a guide, when Hanson said that if we went the other way we couldn't miss it," said a boy from his seat beside the driver.

"Oh, mamma's got another pet," said a young girl, looking over to the lady whom Daniel Deering had seen under the clematis.

"Is that so, mamma?" asked a girl a little younger, and whose face was brighter and prettier.

"Perhaps," said the lady, answering the look with a smile that betokened perfect understanding between the two. "I thought they would rather expect us to come for them to go with us sometime, and we might as well see about it to-day."

"Mamma's always seeing about things," said the dark-eyed girl a little petulantly, and in a much lower voice than she had spoken before.

"You wouldn't have her go around with her eyes shut, would you, Genie?" said the blue-eyed girl, dipping her face under her sister's drooping hat.

"Don't be silly, Maybelle."

"Paulie, be careful; you're leaning too far over!" came from a lady, evidently all nerves, who was near the back of the wagon, the seats being along the side.

"Oh, don't worry, mother! I'm all right!" and the boy on the front seat gave his head a toss.

At the word "Paulie," which had rung out from the mother every five minutes since starting, Maybelle's eyes sought her mother's with a funny twinkle in them; but save for a slight twitching around the mouth, the mother did not respond—or rather the mouth responded, while the eyes looked reproof.

"I might drive a little while now, if you're tired," said Paul, settling his naturally straight form a little straighter.

"You might try for a bit along here where it is smooth," said the one beside the boy, good-naturedly handing over the lines.

"Paulie Greyson, don't you try to drive on this rough road!" came from the opposite end of the vehicle.

"I'll keep an eye on him," said the gentleman by the boy, turning to see that all were comfortable, and then turning quickly back as the wagon gave a lurch.

"Paulie—" The voice broke off as one of the forward wheels was thrown suddenly up. "Oh, Paulie! Mr. Avery, do take those lines from that boy!"

"It's all right now," answered Mr. Avery, helping Paul with the lines. "Don't hold them so tightly. That's better!" Then, turning, "Are you all right back there?"

"All but Benny; his hat's gone," said Mrs. Avery in the smooth tone of voice that had so charmed Daniel Deering.

The horses were brought to a stand. Paul Greyson seemed not to think of what might justly be expected of him as the only boy—save Benny—in the party. He sat looking at the horses until, noticing the pause and glancing up, he saw Mr. Avery was waiting for him to jump out for the hat. He colored, and, springing up, stepped upon the wheel and bounded over.

"Oh, Paulie, knock the dust from it!" said his mother, as Paul handed the hat up to Mrs. Avery.

"Never mind," said Mrs. Avery. "Benny must be more careful next time."

"I don't see how people get anything like a living up here among the cacti and ant-hills," said Paul a little later, looking down upon the white roadside with something of a superior air.

"What they do raise they get a good deal better price for than our farmers," answered Mr. Avery.

"But they're a stingy set out here; Sam Hanson says so," said Paul, tipping his hat a little over his eyes, and perching his feet in what he thought a manly way upon the dash-board. "A dime's as big as a dollar with these mountain folks."

"Well, they come about as hard as dollars in our land of plenty," said Mr. Avery. "I don't think Sam's statement just fair. They are earnest and frugal, careful of their outlays, and living for the most part with a steady purpose in view."

"And what is that?" asked a young lady who, seated directly back of Mr. Avery, had all along the drive engaged more or less in the conversation indulged in upon the front seat. "Their purpose—what is it?"

"One of two, generally. To get either enough of wealth or enough of health to enable them to go back home."

"Then you think the people living here are hardly settled?" asked Miss Blossom, proceeding to tie Maybelle's hat more firmly.

"Very few think that they are; though if the truth were known, I doubt their being contented elsewhere, now that they have lived here."

"I'm sure I'd live here all my life," said Maybelle.

"The last place you reach is always the best," said Paul, with a glance that said, "So your opinion doesn't go for much."

"It's a good way to feel, I'm sure," said Miss Blossom, looking down with a smile upon her favorite.

Miss Blossom was a dear friend of Mrs. Avery's—a school-companion of a young sister now dead—and it was partly for pleasure, and partly to aid in the care of the children, that she had accompanied her friend on this summer trip.

So all through the bright June days they had been traveling, this party, a little world by themselves, and a host in enjoyment. The others in the light wagon were simply guests from the hotel, save Mrs. Greyson and her son Paul. At the last moment of departure from home, Mrs. Greyson had come to "dear brother Jansen," to ask if there was any objec-

tion to herself and Paul going with them. "Paulie's just set on going; and if I must travel, I'm sure I'd as soon go with dear sister Kate as anyone."

Mrs. Avery smothered her dislike to the

arrangement as best she could, and the two girls, as girls will, forgot the discomfiture their Cousin Paul had caused them in the days gone by, and rejoiced that others were to be added to their party. If at any time since they had regretted Paul's coming, the dissatisfaction had been only momentary and soon forgotten. In fact, Genevieve and Paul, during these days of travel, had become quite like chums, and had it not been for Miss Blossom, Maybelle might have fared ill; that is, if Maybelle Avery could have fared that way—a thing hardly to be conceived of. "Put her on a pine board and she'll say she slept like a queen," her old nurse used to affirm—words made doubly true during their sojourn away from home comforts.

That her older daughter did not possess the same faculty of making the best of things—and "best" in this case meant much—was Mrs. Avery's main regret concerning the two girls, and often it caused a shadow to rest upon the mother's face.

"Paulie, I wish you wouldn't put your feet up so high. It's easier for you to tip out when you do," complained Mrs. Greyson.

"You do worry so!" answered the boy half under his breath. But, not daring, while with his uncle, to do other than as requested, he slipped his feet a few inches further down.

"Better put your feet clear down," said his uncle, in a tone that left no room for non-compliance.

"I wish, Paulie, you would sit over here by me," came a few minutes later from the anxious parent; "I should know then where you were."

"I'll see to him," said Mr. Avery cheerily. "I think that must be the house over there, wife," he added.

"The rock is right back of it," said Maybelle.

"Yes, I think that is the place," said Mr. Avery, as they drew nearer to the spot designated.

"Shall I get out?" asked Paul.

"I think I'd better go in," said Mr. Avery, laying the lines across the dashboard.

Soon he had taken down the bars—consisting of poplar poles—and was making his way to the main one of a group of three log houses, in front of which a bedstead with a tempting array of snowy pillows stood out in the dazzling sunshine beside the front door, while the fowls which clustered by the other two led him to think them the homes of the feathered tribe—as indeed they were.

"I have come for a young girl who promised to show the way to Cañon Cave," Mr. Avery said to a low-browed woman who met him at the door.

"Folks from the Cliff House, I suppose?" said the woman, looking out to see who were at the bars.

"Yes. The girl carries eggs there, I believe," said Mr. Avery.

The woman put her head through a side window.

"Deb!" she called.

In answer a fur cap with tawny hair underneath appeared in the door of one of the henhouses, and presently a pair of unshod feet followed. As the girl issued from among the hens and turkeys that clustered around her, she carefully held her apron, filled with eggs, and took a survey of the occupants of the wagon, then, without so much as a nod to Mr. Avery, pushed by him into the house.

"There's just an even four dozen," she said. "I couldn't get Speckle off; she's bound to set. Better have 'em in a basket ready for 'em to take back with 'em. I s'pose you want Dan to go too?" This last to Mr. Avery, who was leaning with an amused smile against the door, noting the girl's business-like way.

"Dan? Oh, yes; I believe Mrs. Avery said there was a boy too."

With a little toss of her head, Deb pushed by him and called out to Mrs. Avery, who was shading herself with a sun-umbrella:

"I s'pose you want Dan to come, don't you?"

Mrs. Avery nodded, and Deborah plunged

into a tangle of sumac and wild currant bushes, and disappeared from sight.

"Is that the girl?" asked Paul, turning to his aunt.

"That's the girl. Odd, isn't she?" said Mrs. Avery.

"I should say so!" said Paul.

"I think we had her for a guide up the Cañon once. If it's the one I think, we've got a specimen worth coming for," said Mr. Munson, a young gentleman from the hotel, who was seated at Miss Blossom's right.

"Let me see it," said Benny, whose head had bobbed up the moment the wagon stopped, and who ever since had been sleepily trying to find the right end of things.

"See what?" said his mother, straightening the boy's hat.

"See the specimen," said Benny.

"Oh, he thinks we're talking about real specimens—bits of ore and the like!" said Maybelle, laughing.

"Make them stop laughing at me," said Benny; and then catching sight of the water his father was bringing, he called for a drink instead.

"You change your tune mighty quick," said Paul, looking down upon Benny as though he had not a very high opinion of small boys in general.

Soon Deborah was seen returning, and in her wake was Dan, his delicate face flushed with eagerness, and his whole appearance offering a striking contrast to that of the girl.

"You sit with the children," said Deb, as, the pail having been taken back, the two stood ready to get in. "I'll stay at this end, where I can get out easy." She added to Mrs. Avery as she took her seat, "You'll have to put down that umberel, if you don't want the bushes to snag it." Then raising her voice so as to make Mr. Avery hear, she called out: "You want to turn to the right as soon as you get to the hill yonder!"

"Marshals her host well," said Mr. Munson to Miss Blossom.

Dan, from his seat by Benny's side, caught the exchange of glances, but not the words; but by a side glance the lady threw in the direction of Deb, he knew who was the subject of the remark, and his face flushed sensitively. He cast a half-appealing look upon Deb, but that young person, perched on the last inch of space on the long seat, was looking far over the wide stretch of hills just showing as they gained higher ground, with as much indifference as though not another soul was near.

"There, them's the Chalk Hills!" she exclaimed as they gained the crown of the slope. "There's where you want to go when you hunt agates."

"But they've been pretty well culled out, haven't they?" said Mr. Munson.

"Father says there was never a handsomer stone got from those hills than the one Dan found there the other day."

Dan's face flushed. He had not known before the opinion Deb held as to the agate his brother had pronounced such a fine one, and which had gone as a peace-offering for his not liking Deborah's sharp-nosed foxes.

"If you don't believe it, I'll show it to you when I get back," Deb added.

"Takes things as though she owned 'em all," said Paul, turning to Genevieve.

"The agate is hers now," said Dan quietly, without a glance in the direction of Paul. Dan was one who took prejudices easily, and he had already measured the boy in front of him.

"Oh!" said Paul, turning back to the horses. "What made you give it away if it was

such a nice one?" asked Genevieve, with just a touch of disbelief in her voice.

"It was mine," said Dan.

Maybelle laughed. "You didn't make much that time, did you, Genie!" and reaching out the mate to the dainty biscuit she was eating, she said:

"Here, Bub, don't you want a biscuit?"

Reaching forward, Dan looked for the first time into Maybelle's face, and Miss Blossom, looking in turn into the boy's, saw a pleased expression creep over it.

"You have not lived long here in the mountains, have you?" Miss Blossom asked, bending toward Daniel.

"Not long, Gertrude," Mrs. Avery said, as though to ward off too troublesome questions from their little guest.

"Oh, there come some children riding, mamma!" said Benny as a party of children mounted on sure-footed burros made their appearance.

"I wouldn't ride a donkey, if I never rode," said Paul, as the party passed.

"Do you like donkeys?" asked Benny, putting his fat hand on Dan's shoulder to steady

himself in a kneeling position by his mother's side.

But Dan seemed not aware that the little boy was addressing him, so made no reply.

"Say, boy! do you like donkeys?" Benny asked again, bringing his face up alongside Dan's, losing his balance as he did so, and toppling over upon him.

"Like donkeys?" said Dan, rolling the little fellow back into his place. "I don't know; I never had one."

"Why don't your papa get you one? My papa's going to get me one. Aren't you, papa, going to get me and Maybelle a donkey?"

"Yes," said Mr. Avery, without looking around.

"There!" said Benny triumphantly, trying to get another peep under Dan's hat, and nearly losing his equilibrium again, "Will your papa get you a donkey?"

"I haven't any papa," said Dan in a low tone.

Benny slipped from his knees into his place again, and, looking up squarely into Dan's face, asked:

"What's that you say? Haven't any papa?" and the little fellow looked around upon the group as though for aid in understanding so strange a fact as a boy without a father. But the others were listening to Deborah's directions concerning the road, and no one save Maybelle heard. She stooped and whispered something that caused Benny to stop talking. It was the promise of the rest of the nuts in her jacket pocket if he wouldn't talk any more, and Benny's white teeth were soon crushing the soft shells of the almonds.

"Are you sure this is the road?—it's fenced up," said Mr. Avery.

"It's fenced all the way," said Deb; and before the horses fairly stopped, she had vaulted over the side of the wagon and was running to let down the bars. "Drive on—I'll catch you," she called, as, having passed through, Mr. Avery waited.

"I should think the cacti would kill you, with your bare feet," said Mr. Munson as Deb took her place again in the wagon.

"They don't hurt if you don't step where they are," said Deb.

"And where's that," asked Miss Blossom.

"Where I step," said Deb.

"But don't you ever get the prickers in your feet?" asked Maybelle, glancing down at the ground thickly pierced by the little mats looking like finely notched penwipers.

"Sometimes," said Deb.

"I think you'd better let Paul get out here," said Mr. Avery, as they came to another pair of bars.

"Oh, I'd as lief!" said Deb; and off she went, as though glad either to be of use or to show her dexterity, one hardly knew which.

"I'm sure she seems willing," said Miss Blossom, forgetful for the moment of Dan.

"Willing to show how smart she is," said Paul.

"I don't believe Deb thinks she is so very smart," said Dan, "but she is; the smartest girl to get around, Dorman says, of any he ever saw."

Mr. Avery turned, and for the first time took a look at Dan.

"You're keeping that little fellow all to yourself, wife," he said, as he drove through into the next field. "You'd better let him sit over there where he can see something."

"I like it here," said Dan, taking hold of Benny's hand.

"You like mamma and me best, don't you, boy?" said Benny with satisfaction.

Dan looked down upon the lad and gave a bright smile for answer. How glad he was now that he had put on his stockings and shoes that morning, and his collar! Every

time that Dan had felt inclined to shake himself free from the little habits of tidiness, since he came to his brother's, saying, "What's the difference now?" remembrance of his mother and the gentle fingers that had once helped him to keep a respectable appearance, came to him and spurred him into a continuance of the old ways, so that it was a boy not to be ashamed of who now sat by the side of Benny Avery as they went over that mountain road.

"You'll say this that we are coming to now is the roughest bit of road you were ever on, I reckon!" said Deborah a little later, in a tone that indicated enjoyment in her statement.

"If it's going to be rough, let Paulie and me get out," said Mrs. Greyson.

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Avery; "if others have been over it we can."

As they proceeded it seemed that Deborah's words were to be verified, for a rougher bit of road none of the party could remember to have been over before: now pitching down so suddenly that each instinctively clutched at the back of the seat to keep from going over on the back of the horses, then suddenly ascending, or, worse still, pitching into the dry bed of a mountain stream, seamed with the deep ruts the swift torrent had at some past period worn. In various tones and voices were the "Ohs!" brought out.

"Brother Jansen! Do let me get out; I can't stand such a jolting!" cried Mrs. Greyson at last, when a series of boulders of various sizes had been passed over.

But just here Deb informed them they had gone as far as they could with the wagon, —a bit of news hailed gladly by all, for the last mile had sorely taxed even the most patient and enduring among them.

"I feel as though I was bruised black and blue," said Genevieve, as, having turned off among the scraggly spruce-trees, the little party alighted. "But I don't see where your cave is!" she added, turning to Deborah, who had touched ground even before the horses stopped, and was now searching for some good piñon gum.

"What are you getting?" asked Benny.

"Gum," was the short answer.

"Get me some."

"You won't like it," said Dan. "It's bitter; I don't like it."

"You don't like anything around these parts," said Deborah, digging away with her finger-nails.

"Don't you, boy?" asked Benny.

"Deb thinks I don't, but I do," said Dan simply.

By this time the wraps were gathered up and hidden with the lunch baskets beneath the underbrush, and, seeing that the company was ready, Deb called out, "Come on!"

"But are you sure the team is safe here?" asked Mr. Avery.

"Everyone hitches here," returned Deb.

"I think it must be considered safe, or they would have told us at the hotel; you can see what a camping place this has been made," said Mr. Munson.

"I'll stay if you wish," said Dan, never timid in daylight.

"No; I think we'll risk it."

"Why don't you come along?" came from Deborah, who had passed from sight among the thick undergrowth.

"We're coming," answered Mr. Avery; and the party was off.

Those who supposed the difficulties of their way ended with the wagon-road, found to the contrary. Brambles, tall cacti with scraggly arms, and huge bowlders, seemed to fight for every inch of ground yielded them for a path, and constantly rolling stones sent upon the ones in advance, really made some of the company impatient.

"If that girl can't take us a better way than this, she'd better have stayed where she was!" grumbled Paul. "I've scratched my hand horribly; see that, Genie!" and he held up his hand, which showed a long, ugly scratch.

"I hope we'll like the cave when we get to it," said Maybelle; adding, "I wish I'd worn a close-brim, this hat catches on everything so."

"That's why Deb don't like hats," said Dan, who was close at her heels.

"I believe we'd all cast off finery if we lived here long," said Maybelle, disentangling the ruffle of her dress and thinking of the Scotch gingham her mother had advised.

At last they found themselves down in a wild gorge, where, among the dry needles of pines and the fallen leaves of seeming ages, they found Deb awaiting them upon the verge of a yawning hole.

"Ho! that's a great cave!" said Paul, looking down; "what's the need of a ladder? I could jump to the bottom of that;" and he tilted the end of the rather clumsy ladder just showing above ground.

Deb gave the boy a look of silent scorn as she dropped upon the first round of the ladder, letting herself down backwards until only her head with its strange covering appeared in sight.

"One of you better come first with some matches; there's always stuff enough down there to light, and then the rest can see their way better."

"But hold on, Deborah—I've got a lantern," called Mr. Avery.

"All right! But they'd better not come down until we get the fire lighted;" and Deb disappeared.

After carefully adjusting his lantern, Mr. Avery followed the girl, leaving the others scattered around upon the carpet Nature had spread for them.

"What a strange girl!" said Miss Blossom; "if she were a boy now—"

"A boy!" exclaimed Paul contemptuously.

Maybelle laughed. "If she were, she'd never prove a Jonathan to Paul, would she, mamma?" the girl said, lifting her head from the leaves and shaking the cones from out

"Well, I do so hate to see tomboys!" retorted her cousin, shying a stone along the ravine.

It seemed a long time that they sat waiting by the mouth of the cave, and at last Mrs. Avery said:

"I am really afraid something has gone wrong with them."

At that very moment Mr. Avery appeared.

"It's all right. We couldn't get the stuff to burn at first. I'll take Benny down in my arms, and you follow carefully. All the harm that can come is from rolling stones. They rattle down easily. Mr. Munson, if you'll please see to Mrs. Greyson; it's only down the ladder, and then down a long, running slide, through darkness, with gravel underfoot. Perhaps on the whole, though, the rest of you had better wait until I get Mrs. Avery and the boy down, and come back with the lantern again."

And he reached from where he was standing on the ladder, to take up the small boy of the party. But the small boy did not propose to be taken.

"I won't go down into that dark old hole!" he cried, stamping around in his little mountain boots just out of his father's reach.

"But you'll like it when you get down there," expostulated the father.

"I won't go there to like it; it's all dark there. I don't like dark."

"But there's a bonfire. You like bonfires; you know you do. Come!"

But the boy wouldn't "come." The mother tried to coax, the father expostulated, but all to no purpose. At last the little man was imprisoned in his father's strong arms, and borne, much against his will, and screaming at the top of his voice, down the dark way. His direful cry was borne back to the waiting ones like echoes from a lost world.

Dan was angry.

"I wouldn't take such a little fellow if he didn't want to go," he muttered; but as Mrs. Avery called him to follow after her, he rose and made his way down the ladder.

Finding that the lantern fastened to his arm gave little light to the ones behind him, and also that it was impossible to go slowly with the child kicking and screaming in his arms, Mr. Avery called to his wife not to pay attention to him, but take her own time and just keep going ahead, and then disappeared from sight.

Mrs. Avery and Dan now found themselves in complete darkness. They could feel the rough sides of a stone wall on each side of them, and rattling stones mixed with dirt beneath their feet.

The way was too narrow to admit of going two abreast, so, sliding and pitching, the one close upon the heels of the other, they made their way, too engrossed in the difficulties surrounding them to speak save once. Then Mrs. Avery said:

"If it had not been safe, Daniel, Mr. Avery would not have left us to come alone."

And the words reassured Dan wonderfully. His heart had been well-nigh standing still with its weight of apprehension. No turning did the way seem to have—only one steady reach downward, a reach, it seemed to those groping their way, never to be ended. At last a fleck of light appeared in the distance, then the muffled sound of voices reached them, and finally a heap of burning knots, with forms looking weird and strange, rose before them.

"Hold on, now! There's a little step just here!" cried Mr. Avery, reaching out a hand.

What was Dan's surprise, upon looking about him, to find the boy who had been so loath to be taken down, marching around the fire bearing a lighted torch of pine, and singing and shouting at the very top of his voice. Coming up to Dan, he cried:

"Aren't you glad you came, boy? Don't catch me going back home without seeing things!"

Of the journey down the lad had quite lost sight.

Mrs. Avery patted Benny's head and said: "Papa knew best that time."

"Ain't this the queerest place you was ever in?" said Deb. "They say there's no end to the rooms like this. I never had time to go all through them. See there! You can't see to the top!"

Looking up, Dan found that surely enough they were standing in a chamber too high for the light to penetrate to the ceiling. The sides were white save where torches had smoked them or the lead-pencil of the tourist disfigured them. Soon the whole party was gathered in wonder.

"They claim this is a marble that polishes finely," said Mr. Munson, trying to break off a bit with a stone.

"Oh, they make beautiful vases of it at the village," said Deb, "but they ask a sight for them."

"I wish I could get a piece to take home," said Paul.

"Ho!" said Deb, peering elfishly into the boy's face. "Think more of the cave than you did!" And away she darted.

"I think she's just horrid!" said Paul to Genevieve.

But the others were following their guide through another passage, and the two hurried on.

"You want to look under here," said Deb, when they had reached another and even larger room than the first. "You can't see where the walls touch the ground;" and throwing herself flat upon the earth, she pushed her torch into a wide crevice in front of her, between the wall and the floor.

Following her example, and placing their faces upon the earth, they found that as far as the eye could reach, the solid walls came within a few feet of the ground and then stopped, held in place simply by a mighty holding on to terra firma further back.

"Wouldn't that be a fine place for a robber to crawl into to hide!" exclaimed Paul.

"And suppose the rocks should settle down and crush him?" said Maybelle.

"Don't talk of such things!" said Genevieve, looking around with a shudder.

"Well, we had better not stay here too long," said Mr. Avery. "This is a good place to get a cold."

"And a cold is what you don't want to get in the mountains; pneumonia's what they all seem to die of here in Colorado," replied Mr. Munson.

The sun was slanting down through the gorge when, blinking like owls, the party looked again upon the upper world. Each bore a piece of the white marble, broken off by dint of hard labor; and each looked dusty and generally disheveled.

"Up here the marble is dull red—see?" said Paul, stopping to examine with more interest the entrance to the strange region they had in part explored.

"And in layers like slate-stone," said another.

And now they fell to work selecting pretty pieces of the red marble to go with the white. At last, with lingering steps and many a regretful glance back, they climbed to the steep bank, slipping and well-nigh falling upon the dry needles, and receiving many a scratch or bruise, but without complaining. What we become interested in, we accomplish easily. They threw themselves at last upon a heap of stones where the sun was shining warmly, by the side of the wagon, and Mrs. Avery reached for the luncheon-basket.

"You never know what you are going into next out here," said one of the gentlemen of the party.

"No; a cave or a sandwich," said Mr. Avery, laughing as he took the sandwich his wife held out to him.

"I'm hungry. I'm sure of that," remarked Maybelle.

"You haven't been any other way since you came to the mountains," said Genevieve, who, though possessing as good an appetite as her sister, made less show of it.

"Do let the child eat!" said Miss Blossom.

"That cave wouldn't be a very good place to lose one's way in," observed Paul.

"Paulie, don't talk with your mouth full," said his mother.

"I should think folks might forget manners out here," retorted Paul fretfully, kicking at the stones.

"You'll ruin your shoes, Paulie."

"They're that now," said Paul, crossing his legs and critically examining the sole of one of his shoes.

"You've only worn them two weeks," said his mother.

"Can't help it; they're 'most gone," replied Paul.

"Shoes and bread-and-butter go like magic out here, don't they, Paul?" said Mrs. Avery, reaching for more sandwiches.

"I never saw the beat of it!" said Maybelle. "I can't turn around here but I'm hungry; and as to shoes, this is my fourth pair, is it not, mamma?"

This set Dan to thinking. He was down by Benny, a little out of sight, but within hearing of all that was said. Then he was not the only one who wore shoes out fast. Only that morning he had been startled by a hole staring at him in the pair Mrs. Stiles had thought such strong ones. Four pairs—how rich they must be! Dan drew a sigh as he munched his biscuit. Who would get his next pair—Dorm? Up before him came the thought of his brother's indebtedness to Bill, and all the happiness drifted out of his heart, and the light from his face. For awhile he sat, unconsciously taking little nibbles at his sandwich, with his thoughts far away; then he tossed the remaining piece from him, and getting up, walked off.

Upon the outer edge of the ravine he stopped. The wind coming up under the gnarled piñons swept his face refreshingly, but he did not notice it. With hands crowded deep into his pockets he stood, while now and then he loosened a stone and watched its course down the sharp side of the gorge, until, reaching a sharp declivity, it bounded over.

It was a discontented, troubled face, for one so young, and Mr. Avery stood looking down upon it in silence a moment before laying his hand upon the lad's shoulder. He had noticed Dan's face as it clouded over at Maybelle's words; saw Dan bite at the biscuit in an uninterested way, and then toss away the remaining portion that a boy's natural appetite would crave there in the mountain air. And when Dan arose, and, evidently not hearing Benny call, abruptly left them, Mr. Avery looked curiously after him. After a time he followed to the ravine.

At the touch of Mr. Avery's hand Daniel started, then flushed guiltily. Until recently the lad had not lived a life by himself, with his thoughts shut out from others. It was a new experience to him; as freely as one drop of water goes out and mingles with another drop, had Dan's thoughts, in the old days, gone out and mingled with his mother's. The very fact that he was keeping things to himself disturbed and troubled him, making him no longer the frank boy he had once been. Like many another, the carrying of the burden alone was more to him than the weight of the burden. The moment that Mr. Avery looked into the blue eyes of the boy, he knew he was standing by one in trouble. It might be a childish trouble, but trouble it was. The moment Dan looked up into the gray eyes above him, he knew he stood at the side of one who sympathized with him, and in that moment there came to the boy something of what it might be to have a father. A mother he knew about, but his father he could not remember.

"Uncle Avery, isn't it time we were going home?"

It was Paul Greyson, and a shadow fell across the face of the gentleman, and across

the face of the boy beside him, at the interruption.

"All right," Mr. Avery said, not turning his head, and then he laid his hand again upon Dan's shoulder. But the whole current of Dan's thoughts had undergone a change with the sudden coming of Paul Greyson. He picked up his hat that had fallen to the ground, and crowded it down hard on his head.

"My boy, if there is anything that I can help you about, you must let me know." The tones were as delicately tuned as a woman's, but Dan's tenderness was gone now.

"There's nothing," he said. And the three turned from the ravine.

"We should get the children home before dark, Jansen," Mrs. Avery said as the three reached the wagon.

"All right; in with you," and Mr. Avery untied the horses, then tossed Benny in as first installment. With laughter and gay words, the others began scrambling after him.

"You'd better sit back here with your mother, Paul," Mr. Avery said, "and let Dan have the front seat."

"Then I shall go too," said Benny.

"No, you will not," his mother said, catching at the little lad to pull him back; "you're too lively to be trusted over there."

"But if there's room, I'll do my best for him," said Dan.

"I like to drive," said Benny, struggling to retain his hold of the seat.

"A good deal better than you like to be driven," said his mother, laughing.

"We might try him over here awhile," said Mr. Avery, who now took up the reins.

"Wait till we get over that rough bit of road," replied his wife, "and then he can try it if he wishes."

As they jogged on, the way seemed even rougher than when passed over before, and weary as they now were, it required an effort on the part of all to keep decently good-natured. All save Deb; she seemed to feel nothing of the weariness settling down upon the others, and, refusing to ride as yet, stepped along with elastic tread, her feet hardly seeming to press the short mountain grass. Now she dodged into the thicket for a branch of some shrub admired by one of the little party, now stopped to break off a piece of glinting quartz for another, now ran forward to let down bars. When later she condescended to take a seat with the others, so full of information did she seem concerning every flower, every mountain peak, every adobe house, that at last a passive spirit of being entertained settled upon the party, broken only by a question now and then. All save those upon the front seat—Mr. Avery and Dan; for, as they rattled on, sleep had taken from Benny all desire to be one of them. It was a quiet getting acquainted which went on there in the front part of the wagon; an easy gliding from one thing to another—with no breaking in of others—which leads oftentimes to a feeling of friendliness so much sooner than the ones most concerned realize. Before they had gone half over the road stretching between the cave and home, Daniel felt as though he had known the gentleman by his side all his life. He cheered up wonderfully under the warming influence, and more than once as they rattled on his laugh rang out gleefully. At last Maybelle said:

"Papa, if you go to having the best time over there, we sha'n't like it."

"Never you mind," responded the father; "there's enough of you back there. Besides, you have Deb; she ought to satisfy you."

Dan looked up to see if Mr. Avery was making fun of Deb—Dan was very sensitive concerning Deb—but the good-natured wrinkles around the gentleman's mouth, seeming ready to break into the circle of a laugh, disarmed the boy of apprehension. Deborah already seemed so much a part of his own life that Dan could not bear to think anyone should make fun of her; and perhaps it was Paul's doing so upon covert occasions during their ride out and visit to the cave, that had set his heart against him—for set against him it most certainly was; even the sound of his voice made a discordant note in Dan's enjoyment.

Paul did not like the present arrangement. Not that he cared much about riding upon the front seat, at least when tired; but he did care very much indeed about a boy in a plain jacket and battered straw hat receiving more attention than had been bestowed upon himself when occupying the same seat. He grew cross. At this Genevieve grew touchy, and Maybelle laughingly teasing. As peak after peak unfolded before them, glinted here and there by the western sun, Mrs. Avery sat wrapped in thoughts of her own weaving. And all the time a steady stream of talk was heard from those directly back of the horses.

"He didn't like it much when you took him down," Dan was saying.

"No; but he quickly forgot his dislike to the way when there," was Mr. Avery's reply.

"Yes; and was as proud as could be to think he was there," answered Dan, laughing outright at the thought of Benny's rebellion which had ended so well.

"Benny is not so very unfair a likeness of us all," Mr. Avery said, snapping at the cloud of gnats hovering around the horses; "we don't like the going through dark places in life, and we cry out against it sometimes and wonder that a kind Father permits it. I suppose Benny thought I had very little love for him."

Dan blushed. He too had thought Mr. Avery not overkind,—and Benny such a little fellow!

"But didn't you hate to do it?" Dan asked, looking up into Mr. Avery's face.

"Well, you see, I knew Benny would like it when once there, and that it was the only way he could traverse to get there. That knowledge kept me feeling all right. And there again it is, I imagine, something as it is in our case. As we go through the dark places,

our Father knows that beyond the rough experiences is that which will give us pleasure; and there is only one way to it for us, and he feels just as sure as I did that the coming triumph will obliterate past trials."

Dan sighed. Mr. Avery had not spoken thus without an object. He had felt, when looking down into Dan's face there by the ravine, that the boy was in trouble—a trouble which was heavy for one of his years, and which had newly come upon him—and carefully had he guided the conversation into channels that might bring the lad to trust him and admit of his rendering help if possible.

Adroitly he had found out about Dan's sudden change of life—the whys and wherefores of his being in the mountains, with the unoccupied days upon his hands, and the bitterly homesick heart carried under the boyish, often smiling face—had found out more than Dan himself was at all aware of. And as they went on over the last bit of the mountain road before the ranch appeared in sight, Mr. Avery wondered how he would feel, after all, to see Benny traveling quite such a lonely road as was Dan. And he too sighed. Daniel, hearing the sigh, looked into the kindly face to see where lay the cause. But he failed to find it.

CHAPTER V.

DANIEL AND DORMAN.

IT WAS Sunday morning. Dorman and Dan were down by the creek back of the hut. Dan was seated on a flat rock in the middle of the narrow stream, with his feet hanging over into the water, which here at midday was as warm as milk, while a big pile of papers that he had brought with him from home was lying beside him. One was spread out across his knees, but he was not reading. Instead he was sitting with his eyes fixed upon Dorman, who, seated on a pile of poplar brush, was busy digging out the pith from a cactus cane; but Dan was not conscious of where his gaze rested.

When Mr. Avery and Daniel had stood the night before at the bars in front of Mr. Gibbs'—the one holding his whip, and the other the empty pail from which they had all been refreshed by a drink from the mountain spring—while they waited the reappearance of Deb, who had gone in for the eggs, Mr. Avery laid his hand a moment on the boy's shoulder, and said in a tone too low for those in the wagon to hear:

"However life is given to you, lad, you want to take hold of it in a manly way, and make all you can of it. It is a piece of the same world here as the one we are all living in; and the same Father is over us all."

It was Mr. Avery's way to leave a kernel of truth behind him when parting with one he might never meet again. With Mr. Avery, all men were brothers, to be looked out for and helped. This to him was life.

"The same Father over all," was the thought that Daniel took with him that night into his narrow cot, and the one which was still with him when, in answer to the magpies' early call, he rose, and, leaving his brother to take his Sunday-morning nap, stole out into the fresh morning air.

Standing with uncovered head under the broad-spreading cottonwoods, the boy looked up to the blue sky above and a wistful look was upon his face. Was there a Father over all, surely? Did he know just the road he was on? This thought had opened a new realm to Dan; not but that he had always believed in God in a general way, but he had never taken him right into his own life.

Dan went far down the creek to wash that morning. The water was as clear as clear could be back of the hut, but he followed farther down—down to a place where a wild grapevine straggling over a dead plum tree flung its long tendrils out upon the running stream.

Under this bower the little lad stopped and laved his face in the cool water, and rubbed his cheeks into a tingling glow with the towel he had brought with him; and then with a shy glance around, as though to make sure that in the midst of all that wild beauty he was alone, he knelt upon a smooth, flat rock and prayed. It was but a simple prayer—"Oh, God, help me! Help me to be a good boy!" often and fervently repeated. But when he rose, and, picking up his towel, made his way back to the hut, there was more of a look of quiet content on the lad's face than had been there for many a day.

"Dorm?"

Dan had left his place in the brook, and was sitting on a log which formed the foundation of the brush pile, the sun drying the moisture from his feet, and his eyes raised timidly to his brother's. If Dorman heard Dan speak his name, he gave no sign of having done so, but only dug away at the stick before him, sending the sharp point of his knife blade far in among the perforations of the cactus. Dan sat and looked at his brother. What lines there were around the corners of his eyes!

Looking, Dan began to feel afraid of the stern-faced man, and his heart beat against his jacket as he thought of going further with the conversation he had agreed upon with himself. Dorman evidently had not heard. Had he better not creep away and read? He looked at the papers the wind was toying with. Should he go away? When he looked again, Dorman was leaning a little back, his head turned slightly sideways, and his eyes resting in a preoccupied way far down the stream. How tired and jaded the face looked when seen thus! Dan's heart gave a great bound of pity as he gazed upon it. If only he could be of help to Dorman!

At that moment Dorman turned and caught the eyes of his brother, so wistful and tender, fixed upon him. The man's whole face changed,

and even while a flush, as though he thought himself betrayed, reddened it, a smile broke through, and he said:

"Well, lad, what is it?"

In turn the color dyed the younger brother's cheeks. As it ebbed away, Dan glanced off toward the gurgling water, and then with a quick-drawn breath, said:

"I wanted to tell you, Dorm—that is, I thought you ought to know—I heard what you and Bill Ewyn talked about the other night."

Though Dan had dreaded this revelation, he was not prepared for the change that swept over his brother's countenance—a settling down of something which bore the semblance of a curtain, shutting out all the glad light that but a moment before had rested there, and causing the lips to close in a grim way that made one think of iron bands. Dan's heart quickened its beating, and his eyes grew wide with fear as he laid his hand beseechingly upon his brother's knee and said:

"I didn't mean any harm, Dorm; I didn't try to listen."

Not a word spoke Dorman in return. In and out of the holes along the cane his knife blade was plunged, and still he did not speak. Dan drew away and sat waiting. But at last, finding the silence unbearable, he broke out with the question:

"Say, Dorman, do you care?"

"I'm sorry."

And then Dorman straightened, and getting up mechanically, brushed off the chippings of the wood and walked down to the very edge of the running water. His back was toward his brother. His head was bent as though he watched the foam playing at his feet. At last he turned, and, coming back and standing just as he had at the water's edge, he looked down upon the lad. Dan looked up eagerly into the face above him, but he met with no eagerness in response. Seeing only the unmoved quietness that was habitual, his hands, which had been raised to his brother's, dropped, and then, as though impelled by a sudden impulse, were clasped around the strong man's knees as he wailed:

"You're all I've got, Dorm, but you don't take me in!"

The man looked down upon the slender boy as though he thought he had gone mad. Then he stooped, and loosening the tightly-clinging fingers, said, his features working convulsively:

"It wasn't that, lad—God knows it wasn't that!" And sitting down upon the brush, he bent over the weeping boy and added in a voice worn well-nigh hoarse by the effort to command himself:

"It wasn't because I did not love you, Dan, but more because I loved you so well! I couldn't bear to have you bothered with it. I wanted to keep you gay and bright as you were when you first came."

Then his voice grew tender, as though forgiveness was being asked for a wrong done.

"I like to see you merry, and the red in your cheeks, and to hear you laugh. I thought I'd keep you from knowing what a dull world it is for some. But—you didn't like your ball, Dan. And now you've found this out; I'm sorry!"

All the time the man's rough hand was stroking hard the fair head of the boy, and pressing it down upon his knee. Dan did not move, only sat with the hard palm of his brother moving to and fro, and sobbed softly. At last he said, without looking up:

"Dorm?"

"Well, lad?"

"We're all there is."

"Yes."

Dorman spoke hardly above a whisper, but the boy's voice was stronger and steadier now:

"If we only could get close together, the same Father is over us all."

Dan had not intended saying just this, but it came out that way before he thought. He felt his brother draw a shivering breath, and then he moved slightly. Dan got up, and, Dorman making room for him upon the pile of brush, he sat down, and his brother's arm rested back of him.

"It's a long story. I didn't mean you should ever know; I meant to have kept you from it—you are a little chap, Dan."

"But mother always told me things," said Dan pleadingly.

"Well—yes. Perhaps it's best; I presume it is. It was away back when I first came. I didn't mean to care a bit about what sort of country it was, or how fast some made money here, or anything of the kind; but just to get my steady jobs, and send my money home to mother, and then when the country grew, get her and you out here, and have a little home up under the hills somewhere, and a patch of ground around a spring where she could have her bit of green, and you your garden, and things would run smoothly. But you know, Dan, the fellows would move in, as I did, with just their hands and their long, lean pockets, and then in a little while I'd see them move off again, with their pockets full, and their big words of how rich the country was; and I couldn't bear to think that for me and mother and you it was just a bare getting of so much a day, and nothing more.

"I didn't mean to get the fever—to be rich, you know—but to go steadily up and down, taking the wages which came to me from teaming, and be thankful when I could send a little money home, just as I was when I first came. But I'm afraid I wasn't just right even then. I can see how big the money grew that I sent home—big to me, you know; and I can remember that I came to think if I had all that I had sent home, how rich I would be. And then perhaps I'd hear tell of some one who had bought a claim—a mine, you know—and had the prospect of making a thing or two, and I'd wonder when my chance was

to come. It seemed hard to think of how maybe I'd never have a chance.

"Well, you know mother never said a great deal about her wants, and I grew to think that perhaps it didn't take much to keep her going. So sometimes when I got my pay I didn't send anything home to her; and when a fellow once lets a thing go without doing it, it's easier to let it go without doing again. So sometimes I sent money home and sometimes I didn't: and I'm afraid the last was oftenest.

"That's how it was that I got a little money—got ahead, you know; and having the money, it burnt in my pockets. I believe, Dan, I do believe, if I'd gone on and sent off just as fast as I got, and kept none hoarded up, I'd have been all right. It isn't always the want of money that makes men bad—remember that, Dan. I was a better boy to mother when I had nothing in my pocket, and did more in spirit and in truth to help her, than when I had money laid by to think about. It's the thinking of what we have that makes it such a mighty dollar; but it's when our money comes and goes, and is made good use of, that we grow rich.

"I couldn't sleep nights after I got a speck laid by. I'd lie and wonder where I had best plant it out to make it more, and I'd get up mornings as tired as I went to bed. Then perhaps there'd be a letter come from mother, and I'd think as how I ought to send something home. Then when I had sent it, I'd work like a slave to get the hole filled again, and mayhap fret because it did not fill as fast as I wished it to. And so it went.

"I'm afraid I wasn't just kind those days. It fretted me having folks near. I wanted to be left in peace to work, and save, and get. Well, I worked and saved, and had my money."

Dorman stopped and broke off a bit of poplar twig and chewed it as though he would prefer to go no further. But Dan had no such wish; with lips parted, his thoughts were keeping pace with what his ears were drinking in. How hard his mother had worked in those days! How patient she had been, waiting for Dorman's letters, and oh, how glad when at last they came!

All this came back to Dan now as he sat listening; but the mother was a brave woman, and only in part did her boy know what that time of want and waiting had been to her. And now Dan did not so much grasp what it meant for the older brother to lay by money that their mother had sorely needed, as Dorman in his almost morbid regret did: in Dan's brain now there was more the thought of how grand Dorman had been, than of how mean.

"Go on!" he said, as his brother stopped.

"Well, Dan, when I got my money, I spent it just as they all do here; I bought my bit of dirt up on the mountain-side, and I owned my mine."

Dorman spoke almost bitterly now, but Dan did not notice it. He had forgotten all about Bill Ewyn, all about his brother's indebtedness. It was as though he were listening to a story with which he was in no wise connected, and now he asked:

"And how did it turn out, Dorm? Was it good?" He forgot that the end of the tale was in his own keeping, the same as when we read the last chapter of a book first.

"If it had, would I be owing Bill Ewyn? Would I be ground down into poverty like this?" Dorman replied almost fiercely.

"Oh!" said Dan, remembering. He understood it now. For awhile he sat in silence, then he spoke:

"But go on, Dorm; tell me all."

"There's not much more. I sank my money, not minding that only money could draw it up again. That's what they don't stop to think about—how every dollar that goes into a mine must have another dollar to draw it up. We buy, and we think ourselves rich, when maybe the fact is we never were so poor before."

"But some folks get rich out of mines?" said Dan.

"Yes; but there's plenty don't. We never hear anything about the ones that don't, Dan; they slink out of sight as though they had done something mean even to try. But all along the mountain-side the stakes are stuck so thick to mark the claims that you can hardly move for stepping on them; and many of them are graves of somebody's hopes."

"But did you try to get anything out of yours, Dorm?"

"Did I—"

Here Dorman's voice broke, and his eyes glistened, and he bent nearer and more confidingly toward his little brother.

"Oh, Dan! If you knew how I worked on that mine! How I saved! How I went without food, and without clothes, and without home, that I might get money to dig with! I've been down in water up to my knees, with only a bit of bread to stay my stomach, and worked all day hauling up the buckets of wet clay when my hands were blistered and the skin flayed off them. I have worked up to the last daylight, and lain down upon the hard ground with but a blanket over me, and the night-sky above me, and then not slept, but watched for the first glimpse of dawn, that I might begin my work again. A man can live a lifetime in a short space of time, Dan, and I lived mine."

"But did you get nothing back, Dorm? Isn't there anything to show for it?"

"Yes: a windlass, a dangling bucket, a heap of dirt, and my indebtedness to Bill," said Dorman bitterly, while his features worked convulsively, and a tear rolled down, striking upon Dan's hand.

Dan's arms were around his brother's neck in an instant.

"Don't mind, Dorm. You've got me, and I you, and we'll get it paid, and go back home, and that will be an end of it all." And Dan rubbed his cheek against his brother's.

Half-cradled in his brother's arms, Dan sat, his head pillowed upon his breast, and rocked by the full breathing of the broad chest, while neither spoke.

Suddenly the leaves of the young cotton-woods back of them were parted, and a fur cap above straight, tawny hair showed for an instant and was withdrawn.

"I'm glad you told me, Dorm."

"Are you?"

"Yes;" and Dan heaved a sigh. "It makes us seem so much closer together."

"But Dorm, how was it you used Bill's money?" Dan asked a little later, as he still sat encircled by his brother's arms.

"Well, you see the mine seemed a good one. The fellows all thought so, and more than one said as how if I wanted them to go in with me they would, working it on shares. Bill, he wasn't the sort of man he is now. He used to think a sight of his wife and the little tot, and all of us thought that Bill was about as good as there was going—among us boys, I mean. But that was before he took to drink. I tell you, Dan, somehow drink seems to bring the devil right out of some folks—or put it in, I don't know which. You don't want to have anything to do with drink. Remember that!

"But as I was saying. When Bill and I fixed it up to work the thing together, I thought it was all right. And I don't know but it was. He bought half the mine, and put a man working with me, only he got tired of sinking money quicker'n I did. He allowed me a fair thing for working on alone; only, powder and keep and things cost more'n I counted on; and when all was used up that was coming to me from Bill, I borrowed of him, thinking that the mine'd surely pay it back sometime. But it didn't; and so at last I had to give it up and go to work again.

"Then Bill was kind o' soured on me, and wanted the money I owed him. When I got to earning again, he thought I ought to be willing to pay part of what I got to him. And so I had. At any rate, I agreed that if he'd get me into this mine here—you see I'd sold my horses to get money to dig with, so I couldn't do teaming, and it wasn't easy getting in around here—if he'd get me in here, I'd pay so much of every month's wages to him on back scores, till the thing was paid."

Dorman drew a long breath. Dan longed to ask how much of the debt still remained, but he felt a delicacy about pressing things too closely with his brother. At last Dorman shifted his position in hunting for his handkerchief, and Dan slipped back into his old place by his side.

"I wouldn't care so much," Dorman continued, blowing his nose vigorously, "if it hadn't been for mother's dying and never knowing what I meant to have done for her. I didn't mean to slight her, Dan; and when I'd throw up a shovelful of dirt, I'd wonder how she'd feel if I found I'd struck it rich. And I meant to have done well by you, too, lad, and make all up to you for what you went through then."

Here Dorman's command gave way, and he buried his face in his hands. Dan could hear nothing, but he felt his brother's form shake, and he saw the knotted veins showing along the forehead.

"Dorman, don't!" he said piteously. It was terrible to him, the sight of a strong man like his brother in tears.

At last Dorman raised his head and shook back the hair from his forehead.

"I didn't mean to, Dan! I didn't mean to have you bothered with it; but you know things will come over one at times. But we mustn't mind now, lad; it's gone! There's nothing more to it, and maybe, as you say, we'll get the thing squared up sometime, and have things running smooth again."

It was a great comfort to Dan that his brother said "we," and as he slipped down from the brush and followed along beside Dorman to the hut, he grew strong, thinking how he would help fight the battle for Dorm; and he gave a little defiant nod to his head as he thought:

"We'll be enough for them yet; we will!"

Brave Dan!

CHAPTER VI.

UP THE MOUNTAIN.

"GOOD-MORNING!"

Dan was down upon his knees on the brick hearth, his sleeves rolled to the elbow, a towel slipped into the waistband of his trousers serving as apron, his mouth screwed to one side, while with all his might he rubbed a shiny dishpan with a cloth dipped in ashes. This pan was at the present time the pride of Dan's heart. When he had first lighted down upon his brother in his little adobe house, he found a hand-basin—rather the worse for age, though well preserved by constant scouring—serving for potato washing as well as for hand and dish washing.

The way this was managed was by giving it a few vigorous rubs with the ash-cloth after each use demanded of it. But to cleanse cups and saucers in a wash-dish was not what Dan had been accustomed to in his mother's kitchen.

"I never knew folks did that way," he said one night when the hand-basin again swung from its nail after the dishes were washed.

"Did what way?" Dorman asked.

"Washed dishes without a dishpan. Do pans cost much?"

Dorman turned and surveyed the modest arrangement, and reddened slightly as he said:

"Most folks do have pans, don't they? I never thought about it before;" and then he passed out and began chopping brush for the fire, and Dan supposed that was the last of it.

But the next day, when Mr. Gibbs came

home from town, a bright tin dishpan was on top of the things Dorman had ordered. Dan said nothing, but somehow, for anything of so little value, the pan afforded him a great deal of comfort. It seemed to bring a piece of the old home right down to him. As yet not a spot had been allowed to dim its glory, and the pan was most certainly in imminent danger of having its life prematurely shortened by undue rubbing, unless something intervened to allay the young housekeeper's zeal.

At the "good-morning," Dan's head bobbed up. At the same instant there fell a shadow upon the sunshine flecking the floor, and Maybelle Avery stood in the doorway.

Dan was not long in getting upon his feet, and he stood awkwardly holding the ash-rag in one hand and the pan in the other. Then, feeling the hair down upon his forehead, he hastily brushed it back, and left a long, gray mark upon his face where the ash-rag had trailed.

Maybelle laughed. "You've got a spot on your face," she said, and then added, "Paul's outside."

She did not speak as though she expected the two facts would be understood as having any dependence upon one another, but Dan took it so, and down went the rag to the hearth, and the pan behind the water-pail, while the sleeves came down, and a dash at the towel removed the unsightly mark. The mention of Paul's name had caused the slight blush of confusion upon Dan's face at Maybelle's entrance to merge into a dogged sort of expression.

"So here's where you burrow, hey?" and Paul's head came far enough into the room to admit of its owner taking a survey.

"Better come in and take a seat," Maybelle said, from the inverted powder-pail upon which she had ensconced herself.

Dan said nothing, but the omission of this act of common courtesy seemed not to be noticed by the visitor.

"Have you told him?" Paul said, leaning in a lordly way against the door.

"You know I haven't had time," said Maybelle. "Here's a banana for you, Dan."

"Why, Maybelle Avery! You said that last one was all you had!" exclaimed Paul.

"I said it was all I had for you," Maybelle answered. "Mamma knew I had this one for Dan."

Dan took the banana, flecked temptingly with brown, but he did so in a confused, awkward way. Somehow he could not be himself with Paul near. Maybelle seemed to understand this, for she said, as though to relieve Dan's embarrassment:

"We'll go up to Deb's if you say so."

"You so wanted to see where Dan lived," said Paul; "but it doesn't seem to take very long to satisfy you."

"Now, Paul, don't be disagreeable!" Maybelle said, and then added in a pleasanter tone: "You've got some magpies; everybody has them here. Do you like them?"

"They keep me from being lonesome sometimes," said Dan, reaching to lay his banana upon the shelf.

"And you stay alone here all day? I should think you would die!"

Had Maybelle been Dan's sole guest, he might not have resented her words of commiseration; but with Paul leaning against the door, as his lips formed an unexpressed whistle, and his eyes roved here and there over the room, Dan wished for no words of pity, and he said, as he tried to look out of the little window indifferently:

"Oh, I don't mind!"

But Maybelle felt that he did mind. She shifted her position embarrassedly, not knowing what next to say. But Paul was far from being troubled. Spying the red-and-white ball upon the top of the cupboard, he reached for it, saying:

"So this is the kind of ball you have around, hey? You ought to see the hard things we fellows whack. None of your soft kind, I can tell you."

"Oh, Paul! don't act bigger than you are," said Maybelle, in her coaxing way, so hard to take offense at, yet so fearless and home-thrusting. "You know very well you've only just got your baseball, and that your mother hasn't let you use it yet for fear the boys will break your head."

"Much you know about it!" muttered Paul, looking, however, as if his cousin knew more about it than he wished she did. But Maybelle hastened to another subject, as if to hurry away from the dangerous ground she had had the courage to step upon.

"I don't see what you do with yourself," she said, looking out to the cottonwoods. "Do you really keep the house for your brother, Dan?"

Paul laughed. "Can't you see for yourself?" he said, glancing at the table piled with dishes, which told their own tale, while a little puddle of dishwater under the table showed the inexperience of the housekeeper.

Dan flushed, but Paul seemed not to notice it. "We have a dish-boy over at the Academy," he said, "but I am happy to say I am a day-scholar, and don't have to eat after his washing. Ugh!"

Maybelle sprang to her feet as though stung.

"Paul Greyson, you can be the hatefulest boy I ever saw when you've a mind!" she said, a resentful color dyeing her cheeks. "Come on; let's go up to Deb's!"

But just here, with a jump and a bounce that sent her sprawling through the doorway, Deborah—fur cap, foxes and all—lighted down in their midst.

"So them's your burros?" she said, straightening her misplaced cap more securely over her square forehead. "I thought as much the minute I saw them."

"What have you got there?" asked Paul, spying the foxes, and glad of any diversion just at that moment.

"Them's Rolly and Towley," said Deb,

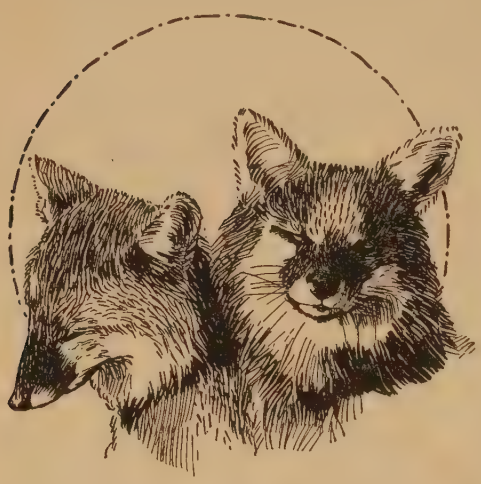
diving into her apron pockets for her pets, and setting them upon the floor. "Dan don't like foxes."

"Well, I'm not Dan," said Paul, grabbing at one of the little animals and raising him by his ear. "Come on, Deb; let's go out and have some fun with them!"

"Look out! They ain't used to being handled like that," said Deb.

"Oh, they're not? Time they were then." And Paul tossed the fox and caught him as he came down like a ball.

But the next instant the boy had dropped the fox as though it were hot lead, while he



writhed with pain. The animal had planted its white teeth in his finger.

"Good for you, Towley!" said Deb, leaning back and laughing boisterously. "It serves him right."

"Oh, don't, Deb!" said Maybelle, all concern as she saw the blood dripping from her cousin's finger.

"The vixen!" said Paul. "Get out, won't you!" And he made a kick at the fox playing near, but miscounting, brought his foot sharply in contact with the stone that served as a step.

Again Deb roared with mirth. "You don't seem to make much at tackling foxes," she said tauntingly.

"Let me do it up for you," said Maybelle, as Paul squeezed the blood from his finger.

"It's nothing," he replied, wrapping his handkerchief around the finger and walking from the door. But though he said it was nothing, it was evident he felt the pain.

Maybelle, relieved by his absence, soon succeeded in restoring the equanimity of the little party, and quite a pleasant half-hour they spent in frolic with the little foxes, who never had showed to better advantage than as they then gamboled about in front of the cabin door.

At last Paul returned, and mounted his burro for returning home.

"Oh, I forgot!" said Maybelle. "Mamma sent us to ask if you'd like to go up the mountain with us. We're all going, and are to camp out. Mamma and some of the others are not going clear to the top, but we are. Can you both go?"

"I s'pose they want me to show them the way," said Deborah, with a far-away look, as though she thought herself fully equal to whatever might be asked of her.

"Oh, no! there's to be a guide, papa says, furnished with the horses. You're just to go for the fun of it. Mamma thought you and Dan would like it. Were you ever up the trail?"

"No," said Deb laconically; "but I wouldn't be afraid to risk taking of 'em."

"Oh, Deb can find her way anywhere!" said Dan proudly.

"But the new trail's awful hard, the men told papa, and at first mamma wasn't going to let Benny go; but papa said he'd take him up in front of him as far as mamma wanted to go. There are a good many going part of the way. Your folks'll let you go, won't they?"

"I s'pose, if we want," said Deb.

Deb was really delighted with the idea of going, but she was one who felt it compromised her dignity to show pleasure, so now her features, almost stolid in their indifference, expressed nothing.

Dan saw Maybelle was disappointed at the way her invitation was received. With Paul Greyson one of the party, Dan was not at all sure that there would be much pleasure in the trip, but he was not one to reject with coldness a kind offer, so he said with more warmth than he really felt:

"If Dorm thinks I'd better, I shall be glad to go. I'll have to wait and ask him."

"Oh, of course!" said Maybelle, brightening. "You'll have to come down to-morrow night, though, and stay at the hotel with us. Mamma said she could tuck you away for one night; and we are to start at daybreak the next morning."

Dan assured her that if they came they would be on hand early the night before; and, contented and happy, Maybelle followed Paul into the road.

It was a gay party that rode from the Cliff House early that bright morning. With the guide, they were a company of twenty-four, mounted variously—some of the veteran excursionists upon long-limbed mountain roadsters, while the children were placed on sure-footed burros. Dan had been but a very few times on horseback, but there were others of the party, he soon found, who were also novices, and as his feet almost touched the ground when mounted on his shaggy burro, fear had but little chance to stay with him. Among so many, he ceased to feel the chill of Paul's companionship, and so was happy.

A proud sense of exhilaration in fact took possession of him, as with shout and gay badinage the party fell into rank and wound their way up the mountain path. As Dan felt the easy jog of his burro, there was more "push" in his delicate organization than had ever made its presence felt before. "It just makes folks to get them up here," he thought proudly; and when Mr. Avery rode by to join his wife, who was in advance, and shouted "How goes it, Dan?" Dan replied "Tiptop!" and Benny, from his perch in front of his father, flung back, "Yes, tiptop, boy!"

At the mineral spring, two miles up, the party halted, and without dismounting, gave their steeds a chance to breathe. Dan seemed to have entered upon his day of great things, and so he drank down his portion of the ice-cold, brackish water, which Maybelle insisted was "just too horrid for anything," without a wince, though the unpleasant taste remained with him long after the spring had been left. The way grew more beautiful now. A stream tumbling down from the heights above, formed cascades and mimic waterfalls, the sight of which made the children and their mothers cry out in ecstasy. Ferns in luxuriance reached to the very pommels of the saddles, and flowers of every hue—such flowers as are found nowhere save in mountain glens—nodded a welcome, while birds twittered and caroled in abandon. Right in among all this world of beauty came to Dan thoughts of his mother, and her hard, plain, slaving life.

"She didn't think I'd ever be in such a place as this!" he murmured a little proudly, as he plucked a spray of clematis and fastened it in his bridle; and then he added in a softer way, "Poor mother! If Dorm's mine only had turned out well!"

But if Dan thought this flowery entrance to the mountain trip indicated what its close was to be, he proved his ignorance.

Soon the way became narrower and steeper, the water poured down more wildly and recklessly, while green boughs grew less dense above the way. At the first little mountain park the party dismounted for a ten-minutes' rest, and instantly the horses fell to grazing as though mindful that there would come a time when herbage would not be forthcoming.

"Poor things! they know what they're coming to," said the guide.

Dan did not understand the meaning of the remark, though some of the old excursionists laughed assent. Before the day was done he understood.

Dan was surprised to find how unmanageable his limbs were when his feet touched the ground; he tried to walk, hobbled forward, heard a suppressed laugh from Paul, and sank down on the luxuriant herbage in confusion. Had his feet been mere stumps, he could not have been more helpless for the moment.

But Mr. Avery had an eye to all these things, and when the party again mounted he bade the children run on ahead and exercise their muscles by climbing, while the bridles of their animals were given into the hands of others. Paul and Genevieve, considering themselves experienced riders, rather resented the need of their being counted in, while Deb galloped on in complete disdain of the "small-fry"; but as Paul was under Mr. Avery's control for this trip, his mother not being one of the party, he was made to cast his lot with the others, and so was Genevieve. So, falling into rank, the children clambered up for a good half-hour, using every particle of their breath, but growing rested and refreshed even as they exerted themselves; and when they were allowed to take to their saddles again, Dan in his heart thanked Mr. Avery for his kind thoughtfulness.

Deb was to be seen pushing on with the first of the riders. Had she been so weary as to have dropped from her horse, it is doubtful if she would have owned it.

"Beats all, that girl does!" said the guide. "Pushes her way along a dangerous crag without so much as checking rein. Never saw such grit in a young thing afore!"

"She'll come to grief if she doesn't look out," said Mr. Avery. "She seems to have no realizing sense of danger."

Soon they entered a broader section, over which a recent fire had swept—so recent that the heat fanned their cheeks with unpleasant suggestions as their horses' hoofs stirred the hot embers—and further on the tall hemlocks near the trail were still flaunting their fiery banners. But the way becoming broader made it possible to drift from the rank of single file and wander off by twos and threes as the minds of the different ones directed. Some of the party embraced the opportunity for a sharp gallop, and, passing the guide, shot on ahead. Deb, who had been loitering with the children, missed them, and giving her horse a sharp cut, darted forward to overtake them. Mr. Avery, seeing her intention, called for her to come back; but if heard, the call was unheeded.

"Never you fear for her," said the guide, as Deborah, with hair streaming on the wind, turned a sharp line of hemlocks and was lost to sight. "I've heard tell o' her afore. She's got as many lives as a cat." Then he added as though to himself, "Pity so much strength couldn't be turned to account: equal to ten-horse power if only got under control."

CHAPTER VII.

A SHORT CUT STRAIGHT UP.

"I SAY, Deb," called Mr. Avery when the parties again came together, "you must not get so separated from the rest. Mr. Watson knew the trail, so he could have taken the others the remainder of the way if we had not come together again; but when you rode off you were in danger of missing them. You should not have left us: it is not an easy thing to follow a new trail, I can tell you."

"Ho! I'm not afraid!" said Deborah, rather

pleased that her exploit had been noticed.

"There! This is as high as you can get a camping-place for those as don't want to go clear to the top," said the guide a little later as he flung himself from his long-limbed roadster, landing among flowers of every hue scattered in rich abundance. "Those as goes up can get back here for the night."

"Well, then, here it shall be," said Mr. Avery, tossing Benny down among the flowers.

Sheltered from the north by a huge pile of rocks, the bright-hued bed of forget-me-nots and mountain daisies formed a resting-place fit for the gods. With no rain to be expected at this season of the year, until further up the mountain, and little to fear from molestation, it was a light matter to make the camp habitable: a slight spread of canvas, a pile of brush for the campfire, rolls of blankets from the pack-horses, and they were at home in their new quarters.

It was just as the hot coffee was being passed that someone asked:

"Where's Deb?"

To which another answered carelessly: "Over with the children."

But this was a mistake. Deb was nowhere in their midst, as was found to their dismay a little later, nor did anyone seem to know when the reckless girl had dropped out.

"Oh, never you fear for that gal!" said the guide; "she'll be coming along when she gets ready."

And as there seemed to be nothing else to do, the party settled down into a partial taking of this advice, though some, Mr. Avery among the number, kept a sharp lookout along the way they had come, as they munched their sandwiches. But when the repast was finished, still Deb was not there.

"Well," said Mr. Avery, as he set down his empty cup, "I don't think it's safe to let the matter run longer without looking into it. She has had ample time to overtake us. I see no way but to start down the trail in search of her; we can't go on without her."

At this there was some grumbling among the party about a girl who "could not be contented without pushing herself into trouble," which made Dan, who overheard it, most uncomfortable. The ones who had charge of the pack-horses joined the guide, and a scattering reconnoiter was made. But these seemed to feel that they had not been hired to look up harum-scarum girls, and as Deb was not one to make friends easily, they showed little sympathy in the undertaking, and one by one soon drifted back to camp.

"Those of us as is going up, ha'n't no great sight of time to lose," said the guide, the last one of the hunting-party to return. "The best way is for us to go 'long to the top, and if we don't overtake the gal—as is more'n likely we will, sittin' on a stump somewhere—we can telegraph down from the top for more help. 'Tain't no use lookin' for anybody on these mountains without there's a pile of us."

They were now at such a height that to look down along the scraggly sides of the mountains made one dizzy; even the way along which they had followed was, to the inexperienced, blotted out.

"It doesn't seem right for us to go on without her," said Mr. Avery, who was greatly nonplussed.

"But you tenderfoot fellers," said the guide, "ain't much account hunting, and there's only enough of the rest of us for a beginning;" and he threw himself in an impatient way into his saddle, as much as to say that he was off at any rate.

After due consultation it was finally decided that the best plan was for some of them to press forward, and if they did not find Deborah along the way, to send word down to the village for scouts to assist. So, with the understanding that if in the meantime Deborah straggled into the camp, some of the men in charge of the horses should hasten forward to let the party know, those who desired to go further proceeded to make themselves ready to follow the guide.

At first Dan had not intended going further than the camp, but when, with laughter and gay words, he saw the other young folks getting into their saddles again, calling to the ones who were to stay to give them assistance, and rallying them as to the "view" they would lose by remaining, a sense of daring overcame his extreme weariness, and he too seized his bridle and prepared for further conquest. More than this, very uncomfortable had Dan become as to Deb. "What if they shouldn't find her, and were obliged to go back without her?" he said to himself.

He, more than any of the others, realized what it would be to go back to the ranch without the missing girl; but then, knowing her as he did made it all the harder for him to believe that anything serious could have happened to Deb. Dan was not as much alone in his feeling of apprehension as he perhaps thought, and it was rather a subdued party that at last got under way and wound its course in and out among the crags, and just as subdued a one that remained behind in the little impromptu camp. A short distance from the camp the guide halted and came back to those who were following him so closely.

"You'll need your jackets and rubber coats on now; we'll meet snow just around that rock."

"Snow!" cried a half-dozen in chorus.

"Ho, he's joking!" said Maybelle, stretching out an ungloved hand to feel the warm sun upon it. "It's as warm as a June day. My back is really hot."

But Mr. Avery and others seemed to think the guide knew what he was talking about, for, getting down, the gentlemen assisted the ladies and children to loosen the roll of wraps at the back of their saddles, and waited until all were equipped and well protected. After this the guide rode up to each and carefully examined the girth to see that all was secure, then galloped into his place at the head.

"So much preparation makes me nervous," said Maybelle.

But soon the party's forward movement made it necessary for each to fall into rank again. A moment later and their guide had swept round a projecting rock and was lost to sight. Trees had now been left behind, and, above timber-line as they were, the surroundings were weird and majestic. As each in turn passed around the rock where the guide had been lost to view, a strong wind met them, throwing in their faces a dash of wintry sleet, and each in turn fell back an instant at the encounter, then, calling will-power to the rescue, pressed forward. A summer day! —who of the company remembered it then? Not one.

Around the smooth side of a mountain, where not a crag rose to break the force of the storm that was hurled about them, they swept, feeling each instant as though the next would oblige them to give up, yet each moment pressing a little further on. It was indeed a sharp encounter, and one which caused the hearts of the parents there to regret that they had exposed their children to such needless danger. Too narrow was the way to give assistance, so nothing remained but to set the teeth hard, and trust that all would come out right. At last, in among the loose stones on the other side they plunged, and here the sun burst out upon them, as though to laugh at the trials encountered.

"Well," said Mr. Avery, "that was a tough one for you, children. Are you all there?"

"Yes," answered the different voices. But time for no more was given them, as the guide even then was pushing on in among the loose stones which lay piled upon every side, and right over which he led the way.

Wet with the now melting snow as were the stones, smooth and square as though quarried, the horses slipped continually, often tumbling down upon their knees, regaining their footing again only by the greatest effort, and well-nigh throwing the riders over their heads. It was a match for the strength and endurance of even the older ones, and the younger—poor things!—began to sorely regret having placed themselves in such a position. But little time was given them to think about what they were passing through; for, whether the leader thought a steady pressing forward the best plan to get the party over this rough bit of the way, or whether he did not realize what a fearful position it seemed to many of the inexperienced ones, on he pushed in a dogged, determined way.

Past patches of snow in the hollows they went, while upon every hand lay stones, stones—nothing but heaps upon heaps of stones, bare, brown and barren.

At last a shout from the one in advance bore back the good news that he at least had caught sight of their destination. Soon up from the stone waste, like a great toadstool, rose the little stone signal-station with its overhanging roof, from the center of which waved a rather bedraggled specimen of the Stars and Stripes.

Faint and dizzy, the party dismounted, and, hardly able to get a footing upon the wet stones, they left their horses to face the now drifting sleet, and made their way to the hospitable door. Groping into the smoky little room an unexpected sight presented itself. Over the cracked and rusty stove stood Deborah stirring with all her might a huge kettle of steaming mush, while in front of the dingy window sat the station-agent, ticking away as though for dear life.

With exclamations of wonder pitched in different keys, the party filed in, filling the room to overflowing, and crowding around Deborah in unfeigned gladness and relief.

"We thought you were lost, sure!"

"You see I'm not," answered the girl.

"But how did you come here?"

"I didn't come, I clum," said Deb, setting back the kettle that bent her nearly double.

"But I don't see how!" said Paul.

"Well, I do," was the answer, as Deb took one of the saucers warming upon the hearth, and heaped it with the steaming food. "He said as how you'd like something hot," she remarked, turning to Mr. Avery.

The agent had not shown the faintest recognition of their presence, but tick, tick, tick, went his machine, as though he were sole occupant of the room. Mr. Avery took the saucer, glancing at the strange girl with a look of wonder and amusement as she pushed the syrup-dish toward him unconcernedly and then proceeded to fill another saucer.

"Just look at her dress!" cried Paul, catching hold of Deb's skirts and holding them up, thus displaying tatters and rents without number.

"Let me alone," said Deborah, flushing hotly; "it's no concern of yours, is it?"

"Were you really lost, Deb?" asked Mr. Avery kindly, laying his hand upon the strange girl's shoulder

"Yes, sir," said Deb, raising her eyes to the questioner with a flash of defiance, then letting them fall again as her lip twitched slightly.

"Did you succeed in finding the trail?" asked another of the party.

"I reckon not," said Deborah, with a slight irony in her voice, as unconsciously she gave a glance toward her dress, showing such unmistakable signs of hard usage.

"But I didn't see anything of your nag out there," said the guide, pushing his way to the center of the group, and laying his numb hands over the red-hot stove.

"Strange," said Deb curtly, "when he ain't there."

"But you don't pretend to say as how you didn't bring that horse with you?" said the guide, bristling up.

"Never you fear," answered the girl; "he'll be home long before we are."

"But why didn't you stick on and go too?" asked one of her listeners, with a light laugh.

"I did try," said Deborah stolidly, "but the bushes switched me off."

"Well! I don't see how you ever got here," said the guide.

"I don't neither," said Deb; "when folks have to go, they don't stop to see—they git!" and she set the last of the saucers down with a thump.

"Poor child!" said Mr. Avery compassionately; "it must have been a fearful trip."

"Yes, sir," said Deb quietly. Then she bolted straight for the door.

Out to the very verge of the stone crown of the mountain the girl pushed her way; out to where, over peaks and green glades, she could just discern, resting at her feet, the little village near which she knew her home to be. Long she stood, her motionless form outlined against the sky that now was clear and blue. What her thoughts were, none of the ones who peered at her curiously through the little curtainless window could guess; but that it had been a deep experience for her, not one who knew the perils of the way could doubt.

"How she ever done it," persisted the guide, "is more'n I can see; she must have took a short cut straight up;" and then he added, while the wreaths of smoke from his pipe circled up as he tilted meditatively back in his chair, "Never saw such grit in a gal afore! B'lieve she'd match a mountain lion if she was driv' to it."

Not until the little party—warmed by Deb's mush, and refreshed by the addition of the sandwich each had brought—had been out for their "view," and were ready for their mount homeward, did Deborah again join them. Then, stealing shyly up to Mr. Avery, who was a little at one side, and plucking at his sleeve to attract his attention, she held out a handkerchief with its four corners carefully knotted together.

"I thought maybe 's how she'd like them—coming from the very top so," the girl said, blushing.

"My wife?" Mr. Avery asked.

Deborah nodded. Looking into the package, Mr. Avery saw a root of mountain daisies circled with its crisp green leaves, and also one of blue forget-me-nots.

"Where did you get them, here among all these stones?" he cried in amazement.

"Out there under a rock," she answered; then added with more assurance, "They'll grow if she sets them out, and keep forever."

"I'm afraid I shall crush them," said Mr. Avery, making a move to slip them into his pocket.

"Oh, let me have them!" said Deb brusquely. Taking off her hat, she laid the queer little bundle flat upon her head, then, replacing the hat, tied it down securely.

"That's one way!" said Mr. Avery.

"She'll do," said the guide, who, unnoticed, stood near.

Deb gave a toss of her head.

"But how's the girl to ride, with nothin' to ride on?" asked the guide, the next moment.

At this a look of dismay came to all. Surely enough! Why had none of them thought of it before?

"I can walk," said Deborah doggedly.

"H'm!" said the guide, as he threw a look round from his high place in the saddle where he had already vaulted. "Here, you little shaver, climb up behind me, and give the gal your nag."

Dan looked questioningly at Mr. Avery.

"I believe it's the only way. Do you think you will be able to hang on?"

"Toss him up, and I'll see to the hanging," said the guide.

No sooner was Dan in his place, than the guide, whipping out a bit of rope from his pocket, slipped it around him, and bringing it in front of himself, knotted it securely, thus tying the boy securely behind him. Then, in clear, ringing tones, the signal, "Forward!" was given, and he turned his horse to head the downward march.

Very humiliated indeed felt Dan as he went lurching down over the stones, feeling as though perched in midair. But on the whole it was not so bad a way to be taken down. The tall, burly form in front kept him from pitching forward as the way grew steep, while the long legs of the guide's horse took him over the rough bowlders much more easily than the short ones of the little burro would have done. To be sure, the view in front was not worth mentioning; but it was not so much of what lay in advance of him as of what lay in the rear that the young rider was thinking just then—Genie and Paul—how he must look to them! And it was this "thorn" of Genie and Paul that scratched and marred Dan's comfort all the way to camp.

But Dan, in his ignorance of mountain travel, knew not what experiences he was saved in not being left to pitch down that steep grade alone. He who thinks it is more difficult to climb a height than to go down one, has much to learn.

As soon as the ones at the camp saw the addition to the up-going party, a shout long and hearty rang out, resounding joyously from cliff to cliff, and not till then did they realize how oppressed and anxious they had really been during the suspense.

"She's just had an awful time," said Maybelle; "see her dress! It's 'most torn off her."

"What's the odds?" said Deborah, making an attempt to hide her tatters.

"But she has had an awful time," persisted Maybelle; "see how scratched her hands are, mamma!"

Mrs. Avery gently unclasped the girl's stubborn fingers, and long, red marks, flayed and lacerated by rocks and sleet, met her gaze.

"My poor child! How you must have suffered!" she said, and stooping, left a kiss on Deborah's brown forehead.

Not in all her life could Deb remember—in her straitened, toilsome life—having been drawn within sheltering arms and kissed like that. Not but that her mother loved her as

well as girls in general are loved by mothers, but it was a busy, undemonstrative life they led upon the ranch, and many of the "little things" were left to be understood. Down through Deb's weary frame that kiss made its way, breaking through the barriers which she in her pride had built around herself. Standing there, the center of that little world, the proud-spirited girl, after all her efforts to hide the dangers she had encountered, did the very thing that she would not have supposed rack or torture could have made her do—broke down and cried! With face buried in her hands, and rocking her lithe form to and fro, she sobbed as piteously as might a child left on the mountain-side at night. For the moment it seemed a grief too sacred to draw near. Even the rough guide looked off upon the mountains with dimmed eyes. But for only a moment did the ones around Deborah stand hushed. Then willing feet went flying for warm water and soothing lotions, while down upon the grass, encircled by loving arms, the young girl grew quiet.

Sitting in the dusk, with every particle of her old self, as it seemed, ebbed from her, Deb heard Paul Greyson say: "Takes Smarty down a peg, doesn't it? Won't be so big next time!"

Instantly, like a smoldering flame suddenly breathed upon, the old spirit leaped up within her again. Those who knew Deb's pedigree could have told of Indian blood away back in the Gibbs family; and the Indian nature never forgets a kindness, but, as well, never forgives an enemy. Deborah scrambled to her feet with no love in her heart for Paul Greyson.

Early the next morning, before many of the little household in that canvas home were astir, Mr. Avery came upon a small wad of white cloth down in the grass by the tent door. It was Deb's handkerchief, holding the mountain daisies crushed and withered. He took up the package almost tenderly and bore it to his wife. Hearing its history, and glancing at the girl, who was still in deep slumber, Mrs. Avery grew pitiful.

"Poor child! She will find it a hard world, I fear." Then with a sigh she added: "I would there were a hand to guide her carefully."

Little did Mrs. Avery think in that hour what the guiding hand of Time was to bring forward for Deborah Gibbs.

CHAPTER VIII.

GIVEN A CHANCE TO GROW.

"YOU see that long chimney there?"

"Yes."

"That's a fine mine to visit, and it's about as nigh home that way as any other."

Mr. Avery and the guide were riding in advance of the others. The guide, having become quite interested in some members of his party, had decided to do the fair thing "showing 'em round," and so hinted toward the visiting of the mine as they wended their way home.

"But will we have time?"

"Oceans."

Mr. Avery cantered back to where the rest of the party had made a halt to gather ferns. They were nearly down from the mountain now, and off to one side stretched a tier of black hemlocks, among which, grim and defiant, rose a tall chimney-stack betokening the whereabouts of a thrifty mine.

"It is considered one of the best mines there is round here to visit," said Mr. Munson, who had become acquainted with the places of interest in the locality. "It's a little difficult to obtain permission to go down, but our cards should be able to manage that without trouble."

With a thrill of fresh enthusiasm, the party gathered up their treasures and started off in this new direction. After a half-hour's ride the path they were following merged into a carriage-road which, like most of the roads in the locality, was smooth and hard, offering the best inducements to a breakneck gallop. But some of the party had little inclination for such levity. Worn and jaded, they paced their steeds decorously, wondering, as the others passed from sight, "how they could." To an inexperienced rider, a fearless horseman is a continual wonder.

In the circle which fronted the little cream-colored building marked "Office," the riders drew rein.

"You'll have to get our ticket of admission here, Mr. Avery," said Mr. Munson.

Mr. Avery dismounted, and the office-door closed upon him.

Some of the party, slipping from their seats, embraced the time of his absence to get life into their benumbed limbs. Soon Mr. Avery returned with a card enclosed in his palm.

"All right," he said, turning to his wife; "this way."

"Aren't you going?" cried Maybelle to Deborah.

"No."

Looking back, the party saw a little heap down under a piñon tree. But long since they had given up pressing Deb into any way but the one chosen by herself, so now they left her and passed around the corner of the building.

Deb was tired—more so than she remembered ever to have been before in all her life. What the two hours' experience of the day before—spent in climbing to the top of the mountain, over a track probably never before pressed by human foot—held for her, was known to no one but herself. As a closed book had her lips been upon the subject, and only the shortest of monosyllables had any one of those around her gleaned in answer to the questions with which they at first plied her. But to Deb it seemed as though the experience of those hours would never fade from her!

Up to the time of her standing alone upon the mountain-side, will-power had done every-

thing for Deborah Gibbs. She had accomplished what she willed to do. But as she stood confronted by bowlders such as she had never imagined as having existence, saw their gigantic forms rise upon every side, and, sweeping her eye around, came to a realizing sense that she was alone—that there was no avenue of escape for her—a strange sensation crept over the girl, a realization of the truth that there are times when the will is powerless before the looming up of stubborn circumstances.

In that moment it seemed as though the heart of Deborah Gibbs died within her, and for a space she stood with hands covering her face, trying to take in the fact that she was Deb Gibbs, yet vanquished. Deb Gibbs to die upon the mountain alone, unheard of! It could not be! What it was to be lost upon that mountain, Deb had heard recounted since babyhood. One who was a stranger to the wild country might have taken in less of the perils of the situation, but this girl knew too much not to realize all. For a moment she had stood dismayed before the situation facing her. Then all the pent-up power implanted within her rose and clamored for its right. Stamping the hard soil angrily with her foot, she cried: "I will get out of this!" and dashing at the overhanging crags, she planted her wiry fingers in among the crevices, and by the strength of that "I will," pulled herself up, and began scaling the slippery way that a little while before she had called impassable.

The sleet that she here found drifted in among the rocks, she did not feel; the jagged points that tore her flesh into bleeding, she was unconscious of. Never looking back, seldom looking far up, she pulled herself along; and then, as the first height was gained, tore on through bramble and cacti—on, she minded not how, so that it was up and toward the top.

At last, benumbed, torn and dizzy, she staggered in among the stretch of square, quarried stones whose heterogeneous mass, as she knew by hearsay, was the waste that crowned the mountain top.

For a half-hour she sat panting and gathering her energies for a fresh struggle, and then, diving, slipping, and at times falling, she made her way on over the untried course.

In the early afternoon, the station agent, sending his messages of wind and weather out to the world beyond, heard his door open, and, looking up, saw standing before him a bedraggled, weary-looking girl, who only by a few monosyllables vouchsafed the information that she had straggled from the way and that the others would soon be there. Anyone knowing Deborah, to have looked upon her then, would have said that she was the same Deb Gibbs who had set foot on the base of the mountains in the early gray of morning. But she was not the same. To be sure, she had conquered, but she herself knew that she had conquered at a sacrifice. One would have expected her, when at last she stood upon the mountain top, to have felt proud and triumphant; instead she felt cowed and humbled. When scrambling over that waste of rocks, she had seemed like a pigmy struggling up through gigantic vastness.

SHE BEGAN SCALING THE SLIPPERY WAY.

What wonder that Deb preferred now to rest! When once alone, she laid her head back upon her arm, and closed her eyes wearily.

But elsewhere the grounds were teeming with busy life. Loads of the glinting "galena" were being run along the narrow

tramways by stalwart arms bared to the elbow. Barrows of dirt were dumped down noisily, while the click of the drill, the slow revolving of machinery, the quick shouting of directions, with now and then a thud from a blast further off, told of push and enthusiastic zeal.

"It's a New York company that's running here, I believe." said Mr. Avery.

"Yes; and running well, too," said a gentleman who was evidently a visitor also. "The best machinery in here of any mine in the country. Ore a little hard to get out—all under ground, you see. Some mines around here lie exposed, and when once found, all there is to do is to carry the ore away. But here, you see, it is dig for what you get. Going down?"

"Yes, when we have found the manager—Felton." Mr. Avery referred to his card, and then glanced around for the one who, he had been told at the office, was "'round somewhere."

"My, aren't they smutty!" said Paul Greyson, as the group of young folks stood a trifle to one side watching the busy scene.

Just then, along a track out of a dark pit in the mountain-side, appeared a tramcar pushed by a man whom Dan recognized at once, black and grimy though he was. It was his brother Dorman! Not until that instant had Dan realized where they were. Coming from an opposite way, he had not dreamed of their locality. With heart whose beating threatened to choke him, he stood staring at the approaching figure as though it were an apparition.

"Dan's seen a ghost," said Genie.

"Not a very white one," said Paul.

The next moment Dorman had turned his car on to a side track, and his back was toward them.

Had he seen them? Dan's heart, as this thought flashed through his brain, went like a trip-hammer. He did not glance their way. He kicked the glinting dust with the toes of his worn shoes. "No one knows it's Dorm," he thought, glancing around to make sure that Deb was not with them; and looking, he realized how like to creatures of another world seemed these people he was now with, compared with such as his brother. It was for only a small fragment of time that Dan stood kicking the galena dust, but it needs only a moment for a soul to dwarf, a moment for a soul to expand. Dan's expanded—shot right up and exerted itself. The next instant he was speeding along the track as though pursued.

"Dorm! Dorm!" he cried, as his brother's car seemed increasing its speed.

Dorman Deering stopped and turned around, but he showed no surprise at his brother's presence.

"What'll you have, lad? Do they want to be shown round? Felton's gone."

"Yes. But why aren't you surprised to see me?" Dan asked, looking up into the face he found it hard to realize was his brother's, so black was it with powder and coal-dust.

"I saw you when you came. I'd have gone and washed up, only I thought there'd be no need of showing myself."

"Oh, Dorm! you wouldn't have let me go away without speaking to me, would you?" said Dan reproachfully.

"Ah, lad, the fine folks haven't spoiled you, have they?" And the man laid his brawny hand on the battered straw hat covering his brother's fair locks.

The office door opened, and a gentleman called:

"Deering!"

"Yes, sir."

Dorman hurried to the office. After a moment's talk with the one in the door, he came back to where Dan was standing.

"He wants me to show them around; Felton's gone. I'll wash up a bit."

Coming back from a little toolhouse, Dorman looked quite himself again, though his toilet showed marks of haste.

"Run on, lad! There's no need of our linking together," he said, with a slight touch of embarrassment.

Daniel, looking up quickly into Dorman's face, understood; but he only slipped his hand into the still moist one of his brother and marched on beside him. Going straight up to the little group where Mr. Avery stood the center, the boy said, without one glance in Paul's direction:

"This is my brother Dorman, Mr. Avery."

"Ah!" said that gentlemen, with a look of surprise. "Mr. Deering, I believe. Glad to meet you." And he extended his hand courteously.

Dorman Deering took the offered hand in a dignified way that surprised Dan; he hardly knew why, only—well, he had never seen Dorman quite like that before.

"Mr. Felton has just driven away, and I am to take you around if you wish," Dorman said, stooping to take one of Benny's fat hands, and covering it with his own.

"All right," said Mr. Avery. "Perfectly safe, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. As soon as the next load is up, we'll take down part of your party and come back for the others."

It was decided that the Avery party and the children should descend the shaft first. But here Benny revolted.

"You don't catch me a-going down into no old mine!" he cried.

"But, Benny, you'll like it when you get there."

"There are lots of folks down there," said Maybelle.

"I don't like lots of folks," cried Benny, wriggling away from his mother's detaining hand.

"But there are lights down there, Benny—nice, bright lights," said Mrs. Avery. "He's really timid; I will stay with him."

"Dan, here, will stay with him," said Dorman.

"Yes," said Dan; "I don't care to go down."

Nor did he. He hated the very thought of the dark, damp region he had once visited, with all the associations following in its train.

"I'm almost afraid to trust Benny without me, he dodges around so quickly," said the other.

"You can trust Dan," said Dorman Deering in a steady tone. "Daniel's not like other lads."

Dan felt his cheeks glow. Praise from one like his brother Dorman, he felt, was worth having.

So Dan and Benny remained, while all the others went below. It seemed an age that they were gone, and Benny, wearied with his long jaunt, at last fell asleep in Dan's arms. He was a solid chunk, but for a while Dan did not mind. All the time he sat there he was watching the busy workers, and trying to imagine how it would seem to be one of them. He looked down upon the hands he had clasped around Benny; were they the same sort of flesh as the ones which were holding the oil-can for the engineer? The oil-boy was evidently as much interested in Dan as Dan in him, for he turned his face in that direction at every opportunity. What a face it was! Dan thought.

For all the time they were gone, when at last the first installment reappeared above ground Dan had made but little progress toward settling the question he had in hand: namely, Could he take up such a life of his own free will?

"I'm afraid he's tired you all out," said Mrs. Avery, coming forward.

"I don't mind," said Daniel.

But it seemed somehow as though he did mind. He was not in as good spirits as when they had left him, and Mrs. Avery wondered whether after all he had not wanted to go below. When the others of the party came up, Dorman was with them, and they paused a moment about the railing of the shaft, intent on something he was saying to them. When it was finished, they all laughed merrily, and seemed to press Dorman with eager questions, to which he responded readily.

As Dorman Deering stood there, his face lighted with a look of interest, and the lines of care swept away for the moment, there came to Dan a revelation concerning his brother. He had never seen him like this. He pressed forward and joined the group.

"You men out here have a heap crowded into your lives," he heard Mr. Avery say.

"Yes; if we wrote it all out, you people at the other end wouldn't believe it," was Dorman's answer.

It seemed very pleasant to Dan to have his brother mingle thus with these new friends he had made. He could hardly make himself believe that it was the same Dorman he had seen coming from the mouth of the mine, and who at night cooked the bacon in their little sod-roofed home. Slipping his hand into that of his brother, Dan walked along unnoticed, yet drinking in every word that was said, and feeling his heart swell with loving pride in the one who, but a short time before, he had hesitated to own.

Out under the piñon-trees, with the cones rattling down upon her, they found Deborah locked in death-like slumber.

"Bless me! what's come over the child!" said Dorman Deering, as the girl shook herself into shape, gave one glance around, and then quietly mounted the mud-colored burro and rode away.

The mystery was not explained to Dorman then. Afterward he was told the outlines of the previous day's mishap—only the outlines; but that was all anyone was told.

CHAPTER IX.

DAN PUSHES OUT.

THE next morning Dan saw his brother going over the crags, with dinner-pail swinging beside him, and a feeling of well-nigh meanness crept over him.

As he had heard Deb's exploit commented upon at home, he realized more of what it was that had borne her in triumph to the top of the mountain and made her come out ahead of her difficulties. If she had for a moment sickened with dread, or faltered, where would she be now? This thought had come to Dan as he lay in his narrow cot that night, and had set him to thinking.

He had put himself in Deb's place, and wondered what he would have done; and then had come the placing of Deb in his own position. But it was one thing to place Deb there, and another to keep her there. And now, as he watched his brother out of sight, he thought:

"You wouldn't catch Deb staying here while the boys over there are earning money that might go to paying up Bill Ewyn. No, sir-ee, you wouldn't!"

All that day Daniel turned over the pros and cons of hiring himself out. The next morning Dorman was surprised when his brother asked permission to accompany him to the mines.

"Lonesome, eh?" he said, looking down upon Dan. "Well, I suppose it is sort of dull here, after all the gay times you've been having with those folks at the hotel. You'll have to stay all day, you know, unless somebody's coming along down."

But Dan was very sure he should not care to come until Dorman did.

"Well, you'll want a snack of something if you're going 'long;" and he uncovered the pail he had just made ready for his own lunch.

Dan seemed quite relieved when they were really off, and as they mounted the crags his tongue ran like a windmill. At the mines Dorman put his coat and pail in their accustomed place, and then left Dan to his own devices.

It was quite early; only part of the workmen were as yet on the scene of action, but full

measure, pressed to the brim, was what Dorman Deering gave his employers as a day's labor: no throwing down of tools at the first toot of the whistle with him. What his hand laid hold upon for another, he wrought out as though for himself. His great nature scorned the petty schemes of some men for saving their shoulders rightful burdens.

After Dorman's departure, Dan walked about with an eye on the office door. There was where they had gone for their ticket of admission; there was probably where they went for other things. But he had seen one man try the door and then walk off; evidently the office was not yet open, so he waited. At last a gentleman, whom Dan took little notice of till he saw him fitting the key, opened the office door and entered. The next moment the shade at the little window flew up; the office was ready for business.

But when, soon after, Daniel saw men singly and by twos pass in, and then with fluttering bills and papers pass hurriedly out, he felt that his time for being served had not yet arrived. So he still waited. At last there came a time when the little cream-colored door had not responded to the touch of anyone for some time, and so, summoning all his courage, Dan went forward, and with a fast-beating heart laid his hand upon the door, and the next moment it had closed after him.

A little man with closely-cropped sandy hair, closely-cropped sandy mustache, a closely-cropped sandy beard, and dressed in a gray business suit, was standing in front of a pine desk by the one window, running a stub pen across a sheet of paper.

If the gentleman in question looked up at the entrance of Dan, it was when the lad had turned to close the door carefully, for the latter did not see him do so. Across the paper and back again went the stub pen without the slightest sound, and, watching him, Dan was not sure the writer knew he was there. Shuffling his feet, he tried to call attention to his presence, but at last desisted, and stood watching a bluebottle fly try to creep up the window pane; and watching, he nearly forgot where he was.

A sudden "Well, youngster?" brought him to a realizing sense of his whereabouts, and also brought a wave of embarrassment over him.

"I came to see if you'd let me have some work," he said hesitatingly.

"Yes. Exactly. Don't seem in no great hurry about it."

Dan blushed; he felt he was being taken at a disadvantage.

"I was waiting for you to get done."

"Yes! Wait a while, I reckon." To and fro went the pen, the man stopping only to dip it into the ink, or take another of the bills he was filling.

"Who sent you?"

"No one."

On went the pen. "Don't look as though you'd worked hard for a living."

"No;" said Dan, feeling as though he was somehow very much to blame, and then adding timidly, "I can work though."

"Presume so. Most boys can—or think they can." Another dip of the pen. "What particular branch of the work have you in mind?"

"I could hold the oil-can; I saw a boy doing that."

"We have a boy there."

"I saw two or three boys picking up chunks of dirt for the carts."

"You'd pick big!" said the man, reaching for a fresh slip, and looking Dan over.

"Those that can't pick big needn't be paid big," said Dan, a little nettled by the man's tone and words.

The one at the desk planted the pen-holder behind his ear, and leaning upon his elbow, looked his visitor over more thoroughly—a proceeding the boy failed to relish.

"How much would you think it likely you could earn?"

"Bill Ewyn said I ought to get ten dollars a month."

"Bill Ewyn? I thought no one sent you here?"

"They didn't, neither," said Dan hotly; "I came 'cause I wanted to. And if you have no use for folks you ought to tell 'em so!"

The man gave a short laugh. Dan never could bear chaffing very well, and this matter of getting work in the mines was something of altogether too great moment to make it bearable now.

"So you know Bill Ewyn?" the man said, throwing himself into his chair and turning to leisurely scan the lad.

"Dorm knows him."

"And who's Dorm?"

"My brother, sir."

"Well, your brother don't know anything good of him, I'll wager," said the man; and certainly Daniel could say little in denial of this last.

"What's your name, bub?" and the gray eyes were turned to gaze ruminatingly out of the window.

"Daniel Deering, sir," said Dan, wishing to give his name as good a standing as possible before the world.

"Deering—Deering—Dorman Deering? Your brother is not the Deering who works for us?"

"Yes, sir," said Dan a little proudly.

"Oh, h'm! Exactly." Down went the snugly encased foot which had been tilting a chair, while the gray form straightened. "But what did that brother of yours let you come here alone for?" and the gentleman leaned forward, his arm upon the desk.

"He didn't know I was coming," said Dan, feeling more and more that the tide was turning against him.

"Did it on the sly, eh? Not such a thing as a boy generally slys into."

To this Daniel said nothing. He felt it was a lost case anyway; and there was something gathering in his throat which made him think he had better not attempt to talk unless it was

absolutely necessary. It was very hard after all his trying, and when work in plenty was waiting to be done.

The man in gray gave no sign of being aware of the fact that the heart of the lad before him was at that moment a storm center. He touched a little knob at his desk. A moment later a boy with a red cord around his cap entered.

"Has Joe Stearns come yet?"

"I think not, sir."

"Take this boy to the west end and tell Williams to make use of him."

All the blood in Daniel's body seemed to rush to his face as he comprehended the fact that he had won. He turned appreciatively to the desk, but the pen was again digging its way across the paper, so with only a quiet "Thank you, sir," he followed his guide from the office.

"Won't feel so mighty tickled for long," said the boy.

Dan made no reply. They were entering a low, dark tunnel, lighted only sufficiently to show its darkness. An explosion of jeers from the men working around Williams fell over Dan when the boy's errand was made known.

"You'll do a stroke of business now, Jake."

"No fear of your barrow lagging after this."

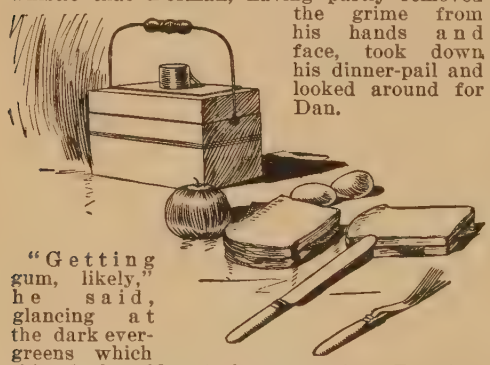
"How much, now, might the 'squire be thinking you's worth?" asked the one nearer than the others to Dan, bending down to peer under the lad's hat.

"Small picking, small pay!" said Dan, determined not to be pushed to the wall without an effort.

"There, now! That's fair. You don't git much better'n that from big folks!" And the man, whom the others called Jake, slapped Dan good-naturedly on the back, and, plucking off his hat, crowded in its place a cap with a lamp fastened to it.

"Pitch in, I say, lad, and show what sort of stuff you're made of."

It was a little after the blowing of the noon whistle that Dorman, having partly removed the grime from his hands and face, took down his dinner-pail and looked around for Dan.



"Getting gum, likely," he said, glancing at the dark evergreens which skirted the side of the mountain. But just here Daniel put in an appearance.

"I was looking for you, lad," Dorman said, sitting down upon an empty car and removing the cover from the pail. "Where have you been? You look all beat out."

Dan murmured something which his brother did not quite catch, and thrust his hand into the pail for a slice of bread. Mrs. Gibbs made the bread for the brothers, so they fared much better than many another in those parts.

"Look here, Dan," said Dorman, eying the lad more closely, and taking in his whole appearance, from the wet clay sticking to his shoes, to the grimy face and hands which Dan's hasty ablutions had failed to make as presentable as usual, "you haven't been in any mischief, have you?"

"No," said Dan faintly, his mouth full of bread and butter, "only helping Jake a little."

Dorman's hands went down upon his knees like bits of lead.

"Daniel Deering! Are you the one the fellows were talking of as such a little chap?"

"Maybe," said Dan, feeling very sure he was.

"Who put you down there?"

Dan nodded toward the office.

"Did Mr. Crum tell you you couldn't stay around unless you went to work?"

"He sent me down there, but I asked him to."

Dorman Deering took several mouthfuls of the slice of bread he held. At last he laid his hand down upon his knee again.

"Dan, is that what you wanted to come up here for?"

"Yes, Dorman. Then, after a little pause, "You mustn't send me back unless they won't have me here. You know Bill Ewyn says I can earn at least ten dollars; and the man," nodding toward the office, "knows that; so if he keeps me—"

"You didn't tell him in there what Bill Ewyn and I said?" Dorman asked sharply.

"Just that about the ten dollars a month."

"What did Mr. Crum say?"

At first, when he thought that Bill sent me, he seemed cross; but after I told him I came myself, he let me stay."

Dorman reached into the pail for another slice of bread, but he ate it without a word. When it was finished he rapped the crumbs out of the pail and fitted on the cover in silence. The whistle sounded.

"You ain't mad, are you, Dorm?" asked Dan, looking up wistfully.

"No, no, lad. But you must give it up. I know just how mother felt when I came out here, and she wrote with her last mite of strength that I mustn't let you do as I had done. You can live here, Dan, but you mustn't think of working in the mines."

"But Dorm," said Dan hastily, seeing the men trooping to their work, "mother wouldn't have us ground down to Bill, if she knew. She worked day and night to pay Mr. Shaw what we owed him. And she'd work now if she were here."

At that moment Jake Williams came to the entrance of the side-tunnel and called:

"Come along, youngster!" and Dorman bade his brother finish the day, now he had begun.

But finishing a day, Dan found, was something very different from beginning one. With a back so little used to being bent, and with hands as tender as a baby's, the bits of ore, selected ever so carefully with regard to their size, seemed to tax his strength to the utmost; and, with the light of day excluded, so that he had no means of telling the hour, it seemed as though the afternoon would never wear away and the whistle sound.

But Dan had not gone thus far to give up for any small amount of hardship or any common amount of coaxing, either; and this last his brother Dorman found when, in the quiet of the log hut that night, he tried to dissuade the boy from his undertaking. At last he desisted, believing Dan would in time relinquish it himself, becoming tired when he saw what wearisome work it was.

But Dorman Deering had much to learn concerning his brother Daniel.

CHAPTER X.

TAKEN IN.

IT WAS about two weeks after Dan's entrance upon work at the mines. On a rustic seat in front of the Cliff House, Mr. and Mrs. Avery sat with a plate of early pears between them.

"I'm very sure it was he," Mr. Avery said.

"I was just driving away, and had no time to stop. But it was Dan."

"It's terrible to think of that delicate boy being put to such work! I should think his brother could manage to earn enough for those two."

"Yes, it seemed to me that such a fellow as that Deering appears to be ought to do better by the little chap than that. But I suppose these folks here get so used to such a life that they don't realize there's any other way."

"Do you know, Jansen, I always think of Ralph when Dan is around," said Mrs. Avery softly.

"Yes," answered Mr. Avery, as though the thought was not a new one to him.

"To think of our Ralph down in a mine at work!"

The Averys had lost their eldest child, Ralph, who would now, if living, be fifteen, but who had left them when a fair-haired lad like Dan.

"I wish," said Mrs. Avery, after paring a pear in silence, "that we could take Dan home with us and put him in a good school. He would not be felt much in the family, and he could almost be clothed out of Paul's castaways. Mary is always wishing she had some way of disposing of them."

"He ought to be in a good school, that is sure. He has the making of a man in him. 'Twould be a help to Benny to have him around," answered Mr. Avery.

"Of course it would. Oh, Jansen, go at once and fix it up," said Mrs. Avery, with woman-like impatience: "I shall not rest a minute till the boy is out of that mine. He'll catch his death of cold working there; he's not strong enough for it." And now Mrs. Avery began the mothering of Dan as though he were really one of her family.

It was in the early edge of the evening that Dorman and Daniel, sitting in the glare of the pine-knots that put the candle to shame, heard a light knock on their cabin door. It was a rare moonlight evening, and as Dorman passed the window over which the cambric curtain had not been drawn, he saw that a light buggy had been driven through the bars and was standing under the cottonwoods in front. An evening visit was something unusual for them, and this one caused his heart to quicken its beats as he opened the door.

"Ha! nothing the matter, I hope?"

"Oh, no," said the visitor, as he engineered his hat through the low doorway.

"Oh!" said Dan, breathing freely as he saw that it was Mr. Avery who was entering,

instead of Bill Ewyn, as he had feared, Bill being about their only evening visitor. Though as to that, Dan might have remembered that Bill never announced himself with a knock.

"This is cosy," said Mr. Avery, taking the chair Dan pushed forward for him. "This is a fine night; I was out driving, and as I had a little errand here, thought I'd drop in. At your books, eh, Dan? That's good."

Dorman had said to Dan, "You'd better peg away at your books a little every evening if you're going to stick to work daytimes." So now a slate and a well-thumbed arithmetic lay on the pine table at Daniel's side.

Mr. Avery entered at once upon the subject of the mine, asking a quick succession of questions that betrayed more than common interest, and which Dorman Deering answered in a well-informed manner. It was talk of which Dan hardly understood the nature, but to which he listened eagerly, so good did it seem to have someone there with them.

"You see, I've about made up my mind to take out a little interest in it myself. Mr. Dobson's an old friend of mine, and he has been trying for some time to get me to take his shares off his hands; he would rather like to make other investments. That is partially why I came to be in this part of the country."

"What, you buy the mine?" asked Daniel eagerly, his interest overcoming his manners.

"Not all of it, sonny," said Mr. Avery, with a wink at Dorman; "just a few shares in it." Then, turning to Dorman, "I feel that you folks who are right there in it know about as well what it's likely to turn out as anyone."

"Yes," said Dorman, reaching and pulling off a broom-splint, and putting it between his teeth, "it's pretty easy for us fellows to know what we're handling. The Domingo stretches right back solid and firm. A vein we opened to-day showed the wire-silver so as to make one's mouth water. If I ain't mistaken, this next neighbor of mine'll strike it rich before many years. We're reaching out pretty fast to where he has stakes stuck, and there's not the least show of its giving out."

"Deb's father, eh?"

"Yes."

"Be somewhat amusing if that girl turned out an heiress."

Both of the men laughed good-humoredly, and then Dorman said:

"There's no question that one who can wait a fair time for the turning of his money, would look a long while before he found a better place to plant it. Just now, of course, the machinery going in is costing like smoke. It's my opinion that they're a trifle too previous as to the matter of machinery."

"Putting in more than is needed?"

"Faster than is needed; though it is only forecasting. The time is coming when it will all have to be there. But they have more power now than is exactly utilized, and there is some talk of adding to it before spring."

"Well, if there is money enough within reach, and the ore is certain to warrant it, it is all right."

"Yes."

"Well, I'm glad to have you give such good account of it; I'm pretty fresh in these things myself," and Mr. Avery laughed genially, as he arose. "But I came near forgetting my errand here;" and he turned toward Dan. Dorman had supposed until this moment that it was to talk about the mine.

"You see my wife has taken a great fancy to this little lad here;" and he covered Dan's fair head with his shapely hand, turning the eager face toward himself.

"Daniel is a good boy," said Dorman, looking kindly at his brother, as he too arose.

"Yes; he doesn't take up a very great amount of room either," Mr. Avery answered, chucking Dan under the chin. Then, turning to Dorman with more of a business air, he added, "My wife seems to think it is not just the place for him, over there in the mines."

A shade came over Dorman Deering's face—a shadow of pain suddenly felt. The next moment it had passed, but had taken with it the genial expression that had rested upon the features when it came. But the miner said nothing.

Mr. Avery felt the change in his host, and hastened to add, in something of an apologetic way, "Rather delicate, you know, for that sort of work."

Mr. Avery felt from Dorman's silence as though he had in some measure drawn back, and that he himself was upon uncertain ground, and he went on more hesitatingly:

"We were thinking, if you would like the boy to be in school, that he wouldn't be felt much in a family like ours; and as to expense, why, what little it was we'd gladly meet for the present, for the sake of having him with Benny. You see we lost the mate to Benny, and it's rather lonesome for him—that is, it's likely to be as he grows up."

"I'm sure you're very kind," said Dorman, throwing back his shoulders, and then breathing a little freer. "No one knows better than I that the lad should be at his books. He ought to be in school, that's sure."

"Yes, that's how Mrs. Avery feels; and let me tell you Mr. Deering,"—and Mr. Avery laid his hand upon Dorman's shoulder in a friendly way—"if that little woman goes to caring for Dan, you do not need to feel a fear for him; she'll be a true mother to him."

"I'm sure it 'd be a great relief to me to have Daniel away from here, and his craft pushed into clearer waters than I can push it into at present," said Dorman. "There may come a time—"

"Exactly, exactly," said Mr. Avery, seeing his host's face sadden again, evidently with the weight of his poverty; "everything's new out here just now. Can't hurry things."

Here a slight sound from Dan caused the two men to turn. The little fellow was sitting with hands tightly holding each side of the powder-pail that answered for a chair, his

head dropped upon his breast, while great sobs that he was trying to suppress shook his slight form.

"Why, Dan!" said Dorman, hurriedly dropping back into his seat and reaching forward to draw the boy towards him.

But Dan would not be drawn. He clung to his powder-pail until it tipped with him, and his brother desisted.

"Wouldn't you like to go?"

"You like Mrs. Avery and Benny," said Mr. Avery, in his turn taking hold of the boy and drawing him gently toward him.

But the lad wriggled back again to his place.

"But what are you crying for, Dan?" said Dorman; "tell us!"

"Yes, tell us, Dan, what you are crying for;" and Mr. Avery leaned kindly toward the still weeping lad.

"I—I—didn't think—he'd—give me up so—easy," blurted out Dan between the sobs.

"So easy!" said Mr. Avery wonderingly, looking in a mystified way over to Dorman, whose lips were every minute pressed more tightly together.

"Yes. We're—all—there—is—and—he said he'd take me in."

Here Dan broke down entirely, and laying his head upon the pine table, sobbed as if his heart would break.

Dorman Deering rose, and with hands thrust deep down into his pockets, stood for a moment—an age it seemed to the embarrassed Mr. Avery—before the little window, looking out upon the glories of the night, though not much of the glory was visible to the gazer. At last he turned, and, gathering his brother up in his strong arms, and sitting down with him upon the narrow bunk, he said in a deep-toned voice of tenderness:

"You shall not go unless you have a mind to. There!" and he smoothed the head pressed against his shoulder, as tenderly as could a mother. As the sobs in some measure quieted, he added, "The gentleman here does not quite understand, but we do, Dan. No, you shall not go unless you choose!"

"And you'll let me stay and help, Dorm? You won't make me stop, now I've got a-going?" pleaded Daniel, fixing his blue eyes, swimming in tears, upon his brother.

"You're a brave little chap, Dan," said Dorman caressingly. "You've got a heap of grit—more'n folks know for."

"Say that I can stay, Dorm," said the boy, still unsatisfied, with his eyes fixed upon his brother's face.

"I think I will have to, Dan."

"Yes, till we get it fixed," said Dan, with the echo of a sob; and slipping back into his old place on the powder-pail, without a glance at Mr. Avery, he settled down with a long-drawn sigh of relief.

Mr. Avery rose. He felt there was something here that he did not understand; and Dorman, on his part, felt there was no explanation he could give of their straitened circumstances—at least to this man of affluence. Were Mr. Avery a poor man like himself, he might bring himself to lay bare the facts, rather than seem so churlishly indifferent to the kind overtures. As it was, how could he, and not seem to be asking aid? The two men parted better friends than before, but with a slight barrier between them nevertheless.

Dorman Deering slept little that night. Yet he was consciously comforted by the presence of Dan: as Deb had by her sturdiness helped Dan, so had Dan by his manliness helped Dorman—helped him to straighten into more of his God-given stature, and to lay hold with fresh vigor of the difficulties around him. That night Dorman Deering prayed, for the first time since he had outgrown his white nightgowns and the lisping of "Now I lay me," at his mother's knee.

Mrs. Avery was disappointed. What a woman once sets about doing, she seldom gives up easily—at least such a woman as Mrs. Avery—and she almost blamed her husband for not managing better.

"Not being there, I don't wonder you feel so," Mr. Avery said; "but I tell you, Kate, there's something there I don't understand, and a fellow can't go very far in the dark. They're so close together, you can't seem to cut in between them without cutting deeper than you feel you have a right to. It's something your woman's wit might have fixed differently, but I warn you, Kate, you had better not attempt it."

And Mrs. Avery was warned. Dan did not return with the Averys.

CHAPTER XI.

MONEY MAKES THE NAG GO.

IT WAS a balmy summer night, and Mrs. Avery, in her own sitting-room at the Cliff House, sat swaying lightly to and fro beside Benny's bed. Benny had been a trifle ailing all day, and now the mother soothed him into a quiet sleep, but not sound enough to admit of her leaving him. She sat—with the light too dim to admit of using her generally busy fingers—rocking gently as her thoughts flitted here and there; and among others, Dan, the motherless boy, came in for his full share.

Her daughter Maybelle stole in. Mrs. Avery laid her finger upon her lip warningly.

"But he said he wanted to see you, if papa wasn't in; and papa's gone," the girl whispered, tiptoeing her way to her mother.

"Who is he?"

"No one I ever saw before. Nobody you'll mind: it's so awkward having him waiting in the parlor."

"But you'll have to tell him I cannot very well come down to-night," said Mrs. Avery, thinking it must be some acquaintance from the neighboring hotel. Maybelle stole out. In a short time she was back again.

"He says he'd just as soon come up, if you don't mind."

"How queer! How does he look?"

"Oh, sort of common; nobody you'll mind."

"Well, if he won't go, I suppose he'll have to be allowed to come up."

Maybelle dodged back, and soon returned with the visitor.

"Hope I ain't 'ntrudin'," the man said, sitting down on the extreme edge of the chair that Maybelle had placed for him, removing his rather well-worn hat, and twirling it awkwardly between his knees.

As soon as Mrs. Avery's eyes fell upon the stranger, she thought: "Where have I seen that face?" The same straight hair, and the knowing look of the eyes—how familiar they all seemed!

"I 'low as how I didn't expect to see no wimmen folks exactly, or I might have fixed up a bit more." And with a little chuckle the visitor pulled down one leg of his butternut trousers and shifted his position.

"I'm sorry my husband is not at home," said Mrs. Avery, with a glance at Benny, who was stirring.

"Well, as to that, I 'low as how in some families the wimmen folks is as well to see as the men, though 'tain't much that way at our house; my wife never cared to do more'n her share of the managin'."

"I'm sure," said Mrs. Avery, patting Benny, "that I know but very little about my husband's business."

"Well, as to that, likely's not you may say this is more your business than his'n." And the stranger gave another low, chuckling laugh that Mrs. Avery felt she had heard before. Then she turned curiously to her visitor as he added, "I didn't 'low to come, till the last minute: most things the gal sets out to have done, she goes ahead and does herself, without askin' odds of anybody. But somehow she don't seem just herself of late—at least so it seems to her mother 'n' me. Don't seem to have no great heart in things; kinder tuckered out like," he continued.

"I do not exactly understand of what and whom you are speaking," said Mrs. Avery, still in the dark as to her strange guest and what he was driving at.

"Why, you see, she's hearn tell as how you wanted to take the little chap back with you, and it's sot her all uneasy-like to go her own self; and she wouldn't give me a mite of peace till I up and came along to see about it."

"Is it Deb you're talking of?" said Mrs. Avery, the first glimmer of light on the subject breaking upon her. Then she saw at once that it was Deb whom this man had made her think of.

"Of course it's Deb! Who else, for pity sakes, could it be, and not a chick or a child 'sides Deb?" said Mr. Gibbs—for it was indeed he. "But one smart one, I tell wife, is as good as half a dozen common ones; and I 'low as how there ain't many smarter gals goin' than our Deb, if I do say it, and own to being a mite put out when she wa'n't a boy." And again the chuckling laugh. "She's the next thing to a boy, I tell wife."

Probably in this Mrs. Avery would have concurred with the doting father, had she happened to think at that moment of the way Deb vaulted over the wagon the first day of their acquaintance; but, instead, she was trying to make out what the man had come for.

At last, as there came a short pause, Mr. Gibbs said, leaning a little forward and crossing his legs:

"You don't look as though the idee struck you so very bad."

"Idea of what?" said Mrs. Avery, vainly trying to go back and grasp what the man was saying when she had been made to understand who he was, and the discovery had scattered all other thoughts. "I don't think I quite understood what you were saying."

"Why, about Deb's goin'," said the man, with a slight accent of impatience.

"Going where?"

"I never!" said Mr. Gibbs, much as though he had said; "What a fool!" "Why, I say,"—and leaning forward, he raised his voice slightly, as though he had just discovered that his listener had a difficulty in hearing well—"Deb's just sot on goin' back with you."

"With us? Oh, impossible!" said Mrs. Avery, drawing back and in her amazement forgetting to rock.

"Nothin' impossible about it," said Mr. Gibbs a trifle doggedly. "I'd have you know as how when that girl of ourn takes it into her head to start out and make something of herself, she can git 'most any kind of a backin' she's a mind to ask for; and I ain't one to say what I don't know nothin' about, nuther;" and again the lank legs changed their position.

Mrs. Avery arose and turned Benny, to give herself time to think, while her brain was whirling like a windmill. What should she do? What say? Deb go back with them! She stood watching the sleeping boy, not daring to face the man for fear of what her face might betray.

"Them as thinks Deb Gibbs ain't goin' to be nuthin', don't know—that's all; and again came the laugh, which now made Mrs. Avery tingle.

At that moment she heard a well-known voice and darted out. She was barely in time, for her husband had reached the upper hall. Maybelle had told him there was a strange gentleman upstairs, so he rightly interpreted his wife's sign, and bent his head as she paused at his side, and whispered, "Pray, don't commit yourself." Together they passed in.

"Mr. Gibbs, Deb's father, Mr. Avery," she said; and then, as the two men shook hands, she tried to steady her voice, as she added, with a look at the wall opposite, "Mr. Gibbs has come on a little matter of business."

"Yes," said Mr. Gibbs; "that gal o' ours

has sot her heart on goin' back with you when you go."

"With us?" And in spite of his wife's caution, an exclamation shot from Mr. Avery as he looked blankly at her to see if he had heard aright. But Mrs. Avery, feeling herself giving way, had resorted to Benny and was subjecting him to another change of position.

Mr. Avery stepped hastily to the ice pitcher. It was empty, but he made a show of pouring out a glass of water and drinking it, his back to their guest, in order to gain time.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Avery's faces when they again turned expressed little; were, in fact, almost blank. "Has Mr. Gibbs noticed?" was in the mind of each. They were set at rest as to that, when he spoke next.

"Wal!" he said rising, "the Gibbses ain't the sort of folks to ask nothin' where there ain't nothin' to be had for the askin'."

"Sit down, sit down, Mr. Gibbs!" said Mr. Avery, now quite master of the situation, although he did not as yet dare to look toward his wife; but of this she was not aware, as she chose not to trust herself to glance her husband's way.

"We have two girls of our own. At first it looked a little as though it might crowd on them," said Mr. Avery.

He stopped, and his wife breathed freer. She had feared he was going to settle the thing before he stopped.

"That's rather an uncommon girl of yours," Mr. Avery said, throwing himself into an easy-chair.

"Wal, yes! Her mother 'n' I 'low as how she is. The next thing to a boy, I tell your wife."

"Exactly!" And now Mr. Avery glanced at Mrs. Avery, and as Mr. Gibbs was enjoying his laugh, they laughed too.

"What is Deborah's idea of leaving here?" Mr. Avery asked; and hearing him, Mrs. Avery was thankful that he did not say, "going with us."

"Wal, she's known for a long time as how anything she took into her head it was best to do, she could git 'most any kind of a backing for; and I s'pose bein' along o' you all, kind o' sot her thinkin'. She's got to make something of herself sometime, and maybe as how 'tain't too soon to be beginnin'. Her mother 'n' I didn't think it would come quite so soon, but maybe if it's got to come, it may as well come now as ever. They say it takes a good deal o' time to learn it all, and I 'low that if Deb once gits her nose turned, she won't rest content without it all."

"But, Mr. Gibbs," broke in Mrs. Avery in a desperate way—the man's talk, with the butternut trousers and old hat in sight, seemed so nonsensical to listen to—"I doubt if you realize what it costs to get an education there with us."

"Wal—perhaps not. But I have ruther of an idee that if Dorman Deering could stand it for Dan, we could for Deb!" and again the man laughed.

There came to Mr. Avery what Dorman Deering had said about his new neighbor's striking it rich some day, and this made Mr. Gibbs' words seem to him a little less like those of a lunatic than they did to his wife, who was really getting very tired of it all.

"But it would be very different for a little fellow like Dan than for a girl like Deborah. There is no end to what a girl will take to get through;" and Mrs. Avery's voice was, for her, slightly impatient.

Mr. Avery's face showed amusement. but his wife failed to see any cause for such a feeling.

"Wal, yes, I 'low as how when gals git goin' there ain't much stop to 'em; that is, a gal like our Deb. But I tell her 'n' her mother that if she begins, I want her to hold her head up with the best on 'em. Money 'n' brains is generally what makes the nag go, and I reckon as how when it comes to a tight pinch, we can eke out enough between us."

Mrs. Avery rose, a bright spot burning in each cheek. "You gentlemen will have to excuse me while I go for the girls," she said a little stiffly, giving her husband's arm a warning pressure as she passed by.

Soon after leaving the room, Mrs. Avery had the satisfaction of seeing her husband show their guest out, and of hearing him say, as they went along down the stairs:

"Of course we shall have to think it over before anything can be decided."

The room vacated, Mrs. Avery ran to her husband. "For pity's sake, Jansen!" Mr. Avery laughed long and heartily. "But how are we to get out of it?"

"By taking the girl with us, I guess."

"Never, as long as my name is Kate Avery! The idea!"

"Don't be too sure. Deb may turn out an heiress some day, according to Dorman Deering."

"Now, Jansen, wasn't that all bluster about their being so well able to do for Deb?" asked Mrs. Avery, unfastening the ribbon at her throat.

"Hardly. I have heard a good many times that that ranch of his is the best one within fifty miles; and it beats all, Kate, how they coin the money out of a little bit of ground here, when once under a perfect system of irrigation."

"But just think how that girl goes looking."

"About time she turned over a new leaf if she expects to hold her head up 'alongside o' the best,' is it not?"

"I should say it was! Who ever thought of things shaping like this!"

"Well, sleep on it Kate, somehow. But—well, she is rather an uncommon girl."

"But it cannot be. What would Genie and Maybelle say?"

Toward morning Mrs. Avery laid her hand upon her husband. "Jansen, are you asleep?"

"No."

"Do you know, I've been thinking that if Deb is likely to have money, what a pity it

would be for some of it not to be spent on her education before she was too big for it! She's smart."

"So her father thinks," came sleepily from Mr. Avery.

"But she is, Jansen."

"I'm afraid I must have another nap, Kate."

In the face of all her assurance of the evening before, Mrs. Avery could not rest the next day until she had the matter looked into more thoroughly.

At last Mr. Avery concluded to visit the ranch, and the horse was ordered.

"When I think," Mrs. Avery said as they were waiting on the balcony for the buckboard to be brought round, "of how the child reached the top of that mountain, and how she pushed her way through difficulties most people would have died under, I can't tell you how I feel. If she should push out for a better sort of life, especially with money to aid her, what is to hinder her accomplishing it?"

When Mr. Avery was gathering up the reins Mrs. Avery ran to him and said, "I think, if you really find there's likely to be plenty to take her through school, you may as well fix it up, for I do not believe I ever could go off and leave her, knowing she wanted to make a start."

"I'm almost afraid, wife, you're being 'come over' by a little money," said Mr. Avery quizzically.

"Now, Jansen!"

"But last night, you know—"

"But that was before I knew all the circumstances."

"Exactly—about the money," said Mr. Avery, laughing as though immensely amused at getting such a joke as that on Kate, of all people.

But Mrs. Avery, looking smilingly after her husband, did not seem to mind it a great deal, and only called out:

"Don't be gone long, Jansen; I shall want to know what comes of it."

CHAPTER XII.

AS GOOD AS THE BEST.

MR. AVERY found Mr. Gibbs leaning on his hoe-handle in the middle of his wheat field, watching the water from the trench he had just opened trickle in among the roots of the tall wheat before the thirsty ground quickly absorbed it.

"Nice day. I 'lowed that likely 's not you'd hang out to-day."

"Fine weather for you farmers," said Mr. Avery, taking the brown hand extended; "I see you have your land pretty well surrounded," he added, as his eye swept the ditches and the wooden troughs along the roadside bearing down from the mountain.

"Wal, yes. Some say as how I've got more water 'n I have land. But better be that way here, I tell 'em, than t'other;" and Mr. Gibbs laughed.

"Pretty dependent you people here are on your springs," said Mr. Avery; "how long now since you have had a good rain?"

"A year next month. Been an uncommon dry season, this."

"So they tell me. I've seen more dead cattle since coming into this region than I ever saw lying around before. Your springs never fail?"

"Never have. I 'low as how it's a pretty good test of 'em this year."

"And how many have you?"

"There's two right by the creek, and one on the brow yonder where you see that house."

"Then you own up as far as that?"

"Yes, and quite a bit beyond; the prettiest bit of land you'll find anywhere in this section."

"And when you get a good system of irrigation going, the ranches pay about as well as the mines, do they not?"

"Just as well, 'n' better too for them as wants to work by themselves; and enough sight quicker turnin' of your money. If you want to see a spring-house that is a spring-house," continued Mr. Gibbs, guiding the water here and there with his hoe as the two strolled along the narrow path through the wheat, "you ought to look into that little spring-house up yonder; the way the water runs in there, and that sister of mine spanks down the butter, 'd make your mouth water. Just the same as gold, too, every pound of it."

"Then you have a sister living with you?"

"Yes; I 'lowed when we got settled here that Martha hadn't never had no great sight of a chance, and that wife couldn't do it all—and somehow wife never was no great shakes at butter-making. But you take hens now, and it beats all what Nancy will make 'em do. I tell 'em a chick can't git no chance to die when she's around; and as to laying, she'll shake the eggs out of 'em whether they will or no," said Mr. Gibbs, laughing heartily.

"Well, neighbor," said Mr. Avery, making his way with care through the squash-vines they had now reached on their nearer approach

to the house, "how is it going to be about that little matter you were speaking of last night?"

"Wal, I 'low that's more for you to say 'n for us. I told you if Deb's a mind to start out, she can, 'n' git 'most any kind of a backing she wants. But I didn't see as there was any great show o' you folks jumping at it last night."

"Well, friend Gibbs, changes jumped into too quickly are not generally the ones that stand testing. Better go slow and sure—that's our way."

"Just 's you say, neighbor," said Mr. Gibbs, and with a quick stroke he laid low a tall weed that had stolen a march on him.

"I don't quite see why you shouldn't do for that girl of yours about as you have a mind."

"Wal—yes. I 'lowed as how you'd come round to about that way of thinking. We as come into these parts first didn't come for nothing, and wedge our way in by hook and by crook, not by a good deal! There's Deb, now, can come in for as thick a slice as the best of 'em, if I do say it. And if she wants to get out where she can perk her head up alongside the rest o' folks, let her, I say. And I'll back her in it, too."

"But, Mr. Gibbs, when these girls of ours once get going, it sometimes takes a good deal of solid cash to pull them through."

"Look a-here!" said Mr. Gibbs, turning suddenly and planting himself upon his hoe-handle directly in front of his visitor, while he fixed his gray eyes in a keen look upon him, "do I look like a turnin', floppy sort of man what 'd have one idee one day and another another? Is 't likely I'd 'a' got all this"—and he swept one arm out over his lands—"and not owe a dollar on it nuther, if I was the milk-and-water kind o' folks as couldn't stick to things? How did that gal o' mine git to the top the day you folks lost her up the mountain?" Mr. Avery winced a trifle, but before he could reply Mr. Gibbs answered his own question. "Just by clutching hold with her two hands—that's how; and if you don't believe it, go and look at her hands carrying the marks yet. And how'd I get to the top here? Just in the same way—with these two hands!" and loosening his hold upon the hoe, he shook those roughened members in Mr. Avery's face. "Deb 'n' me is the kind that what we say we'll do we do, and we don't take no great sight o' boostin' nuther. But mind ye"—and stooping, he picked up his hoe again—"if that gal o' ourn goes with you folks, there ain't to be no bowin' an' scrapin'. It's money that makes the nag go, and I've got enough of that so that Deb's nag can go as fast as anybody's—and no odds to anyone;" and Mr. Gibbs started on with such long, swinging strides for so little a man, that his companion wondered how he ever did it.

"Well," said Mr. Avery, when at last Mr. Gibbs' slackened pace made it possible for him to come alongside again, "if it's your mind to have Deborah go with us, and her mind and her mother's, why, go it is. My wife will do the best she can for the girl, and what she can't do she'll see is done. There is no reason why your daughter can't make something of herself if she has a mind. And I must say I respect her for wanting to get out where the best is to be had."

They had now reached the house. Mrs. Gibbs stood in the doorway hastily letting down her sleeves. Deborah was nowhere in sight. But if they had happened to look at the loft of one of the log hen-houses, they would have seen that the proceedings of the last half-hour had been carefully watched by her, though her head had been withdrawn as she saw the two men turn toward the house.

"Well, wife, I 'low as how the thing's about the same as done," said Mr. Gibbs, all ill-humor dropping from his voice.

Mrs. Gibbs' face flushed with timid pleasure as she said, "I'm sure it's a great thing to ask of you."

"Now, Nancy, we ain't goin' to have no bowin' and scrapin', I tell him. No use o' gittin' down in the dust to folks just 'cause you offer 'em a chance to handle a little of your money."

"But, Clement—"

"Yes, I know. But Deb's no fool, and she hain't got to hang herself on to folks like a wet rag. She's goin', if she goes at all, with her head up alongside of the best on 'em, and I'll back her in it too;" and Mr. Gibbs, stepping over a board that had been placed in the door to keep the chickens out, passed into the house, while Mrs. Gibbs embraced this opportunity to assure Mr. Avery that they would not be losers for standing by Deb.

At the door of the best room—a little lean-to opening upon a rude porch—Mr. Gibbs now appeared, and Mrs. Gibbs hastened forward, followed by Mr. Avery.

A rag carpet stretched its gay lengths here, while a lounge covered with red calico, and a "Boston rocker," gave the room quite a fine look compared with the rest of the house. Upon the stone hearth the little foxes were tumbling like two squirrels.

Mr. Gibbs reached behind a tall bureau with glass knobs that stood in a conspicuous place in the room, and drew out a huge leather-covered book which looked as though it had some time done good service as an account book. And so it had, in the little blacksmith's shop by the blue Connecticut, where Mr. Gibbs' father had daily beaten the ringing anvil, and daily scored his accounts with this one and that of his customers. As Mr. Gibbs turned over the pages, the visitor caught sight more than once of the seal of a government bond, and he smiled at thought of the strangeness of such a bank.

"There!" said Mr. Gibbs, coming to what he seemed to be in search of, and taking out a neat roll of bills laid smoothly together, with a narrow bit of coarse white muslin

pinned around them, "Nancy feels as how your wife 'd know better 'n she what Deb wants;" and he handed the money to Mr. Avery. "No use o' her takin' along any old duds; may as well start fair 'n' square."

"Then you wish this for her outfit?" said Mr. Avery, opening his pocketbook and placing the money in it, while he looked at the mother standing there with a pleased flush on her thin, worn face.

"Yes," she said; "Deb feels as though your wife 'd know best. They say it beats all how many things folks think they must have out that way."

"Yes; but it is not always wise to encourage our young folks in thinking they must have all there is to have," said Mr. Avery.

"Now, look here! We don't want no scrimpin' on Deb," broke in Mr. Gibbs. "There's a hundred dollars, and when that's gone, there's another hundred where that come from, and another, and another."

"Well, friends," said Mr. Avery, "wife and I ought to try to do our part, so long as you seem so ready to do yours. There is no doubt, when there's money to aid, that many things otherwise unattainable are placed within our reach. We will do our best to help Deborah. It was a magnificent bit of climbing she did on the mountain, and there are more mountains for her if she cares to scale them."

Then he shook hands with Mrs. Gibbs kindly and turned to her husband.

"That's the talk!" said the ranchman, taking hold of Mr. Avery's hand and shaking it up and down like a pump-handle.

Mr. Avery rode home in a very thoughtful frame of mind. Scarcely could he remember to have seen a child quite so imbedded in a father's heart as here, and about the same could be said concerning the mother. Suppose Deborah should disappoint them! "But she must just be made not to!" he ejaculated, switching away the gnats, and then, as he came to a steep descent, gathering up the reins more tightly.

But he sighed. Gladly would he have saved both himself and his wife from such a responsibility. And this he told his wife when he again stood beside her.

But Mrs. Avery was a brave, true woman—not one to flinch when a time came for reaching forth. She laid her hand upon her husband's shoulder, and said:

"She has her future before her. It seems only right to help her if possible."

CHAPTER XIII.

A BLINDING FLASH.

"BILL EWYN'S dead!"

Dorman and Dan were at their evening meal when Deb, thrusting her head in at the window, shot the news at them. It had been a hard day for the brothers. Somehow, since Mr. Avery's offer for Dan, work at the mines had seemed harder: just as the opening of a door from a lighted room makes the darkness seem all the more impenetrable when it is closed again. To be sure, Dorman had put more undaunted will in all that he had taken hold of, but, exert himself as he might, it was after all only so much a day coming in, and nothing more; and the days were making inroads upon their small stock of clothing, and interest was counting up.

At Deb's words, Dorman's baked potato fell from his hand, and his knife dropped heavily upon his plate.

"It's so; father heard it at the mill. They've got him out and taken him home."

Dorman mechanically took up his potato and plunged his knife into its steaming heart, but he said not a word. Deb waited, but at last, seeming to think nothing further was to be gained, took herself off.

Dorman kept on with his supper, eating in a preoccupied way, first one thing and then another, apparently with no thought as to his selection. But Daniel could not eat. His bringing-up kept him silent. But food choked him.

"If—" But he got no further. At last he arose and stole out under the cottonwoods, and there he stood, the torrent of thought which surged up through his little brain wearying it. A stiff south wind was blowing, making the leaves of the cottonwood sigh complainingly, but Dan heard it not. He was turning over and over that one small word, with all that out of it might grow—"If!"

Almost bursting was his heart with the thought that perhaps in a way not dreamed of, release had come to them and they were free from the grinding shackles of debt. Looking up to the sky, where the dark clouds were scudding, Dan cried from the very fullness of his heart as he clasped his slender hands fervently:

"Oh, God, if it has come!—if we never have to pay another dollar, and Dorm's let go free again—I never will forget it as long as I live. I never will. And I'll try to be a good boy all my life, just as mother wants me to be." Then he walked further off down among the sumacs.

When Dan returned to the cabin, he found Mr. Gibbs there talking over the accident, while Dorman was clearing away the supper dishes. Bill Ewyn had not been employed in the Domingo mine, where the Deering boys worked, but in one a couple of miles further up the mountain. He had been working in a new part, and suddenly it had caved, covering him instantly.

Dan helped make the dishes ready for the little corner cupboard, and when the hearth was brushed and Mr. Gibbs had gone, began to prepare for bed. With his shoes off, and his suspenders hanging, he came at last and stood beside his brother, who, with back toward Dan and hands crossed behind him,

stood looking down into the coals now white with ashes.

"Dorman?"

"Yes, lad."

"If Bill Ewyn's dead, will we have to pay any more?"

Dan's voice was hardly more than a whisper. There was a pause, in which it seemed to the anxious boy he could hear his heart beat.

"I've thought it all over, Daniel, and it wouldn't be right. I know there's no one who knows how it stands, for Bill was close-mouthed in general; and I know, too, that more 'n likely it would have been all drunk up if he'd 'a' had it. But that don't alter the fact that there's Mary, his wife, and what he's left is hers. Then there's the little tot, too, without anybody to call father now. No, it wouldn't be right—there's no way of getting around that—and we want to do the fair and square thing always, Dan. You know that." This last with a forced cheerfulness, and turning to look for the first time upon his brother.

It was a great disappointment to Daniel. He stood and tried to scramble out from under the weight of it; tried to settle back under the burden he had thought gone, and not mind; but oh, he did mind bitterly! And he had so thought God was with them and had come to their help! And he had meant to be such a good boy—just such a one as his mother would have wished him to be!

"How much is it you owe now?" at last he plucked up courage, in his bitter disappointment, to ask.

"Three hundred and fifty dollars, not counting the interest," said his brother with an attempt at boldness.

"Oh, Dorm, so much! I wouldn't have thought you'd have used so much of other folks' money," said Dan fretfully, as he made his way to his little bunk.

For a while Dorman stood just where Dan had left him, then he too turned to his place of rest.

The clock ticked its way toward another hour. There was a slight rustle, and in the dim light a small figure stood beside Dorman's bed.

"Dorm?"

"Yes, lad. What is it?"

"I'm sorry I blamed you so."

In an instant the bed-coverings were thrown back, and two strong arms reached out and drew Dan in under them. For a moment or two there were sobs, then a few whispered words, and then the clock ticked on undisturbed. All that night the larger bed held two, the smaller none.

When Mary Ewyn, in the doorway of her mother's adobe house in the southern part of the county, received Dorman Deering's letter, which followed close on the news of her husband's death, she read it with tears dripping slowly down her face.

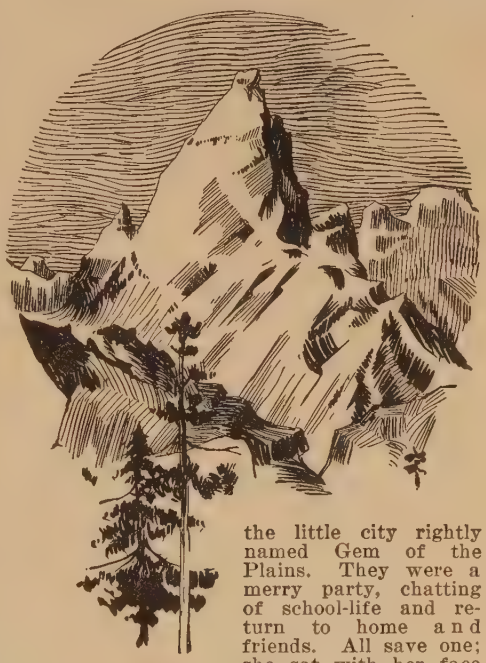
"Eighteen dollars a month we will send, surely, till the thing is paid, and most truly do I wish we could pay it to you all down," the letter ran.

Eighteen dollars a month!—when a moment before she had not known where one dollar a month was to come from. They would not starve for awhile yet, at any rate. How good the Lord was! The child came up and laid her head in sympathy upon her mother's lap.

"Is it for pa?" she asked.

Mary started guiltily. Most wives did mourn at such a time, and she—she was well-nigh weeping tears of deliverance. Yet there had been a time when Mary and William Ewyn had looked fondly into each other's faces and said, as wives and husbands do say, "How could I live if parted from you!" But that was before the rum fiend had slipped his gigantic shape in between them.

The day had just a touch of September flavor to it when the Avery party started from



the little city rightly named Gem of the Plains. They were a merry party, chatting of school-life and return to home and friends. All save one; she sat with her face turned toward the mountains, saying not a word—a little figure in brown, with just a dash of color among the russet tints, and with a drooping hat bent low over a dark, sunburned face. The lithe form was carried a little constrainedly, as though not quite used to its new garb. Could the others have looked under the low-tilted hat, they would have noticed an intent, eager look in the gray eyes that per-

haps would have astonished them, so unusual was it in a girl so young.

As the cars swept on and the mountains fell further back, the snow-caps raising their heads in the matchless atmosphere, the girl's form lost its last bit of stiffness, while her face flushed swiftly with eagerness. "Good-by, white-tops!" she whispered to herself. Then with parted lips she sat and drank in the last bit of glory; sat until only a faint outline showed against the horizon. "Gone!" she murmured, and drew a long breath, then stirred her feet, already uneasy in their strange confinement. "I was a lot to those folks there," she murmured, as her eyes still rested on the spot where she knew her home was, "but I ain't anybody to these;" and had Deborah Gibbs been older and more used to framing questions, she might have asked herself in that hour if she was not paying dearly for what she expected to get.

As it was, she felt only an undefined sense of uneasiness as to how it was likely to turn out. When Mrs. Avery motioned to her, Deb got up, and, using the back of the seats for a support, made her way to the lady and took the vacant seat she offered.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE END COME.

IT WAS a day late in November. Dorman had sent Dan home alone from the mine, as he was detained in the office. Dorman of late had been entrusted with a good many commissions and little jobs out of the general run, and each made him feel a thrill of pleasure that confidence was reposed in him—confidence in advance of his position.

"Well, Deering," said Mr. Crum, straightening the papers on the spindle-shanked desk, "things keep pretty brisk for so late in the season."

"Well, yes, it would seem so."

"That brother of yours hangs on yet, I see."

The shadow that always fell over Dorman Deering's face when Dan was mentioned in connection with the mines, swooped down at once, but Mr. Crum was busy with his papers and did not notice it.

"A great deal of pluck for so little a chap." Bang went the ledger into the safe. "Yes, a great deal of pluck."

Dorman shut his teeth and tried not to mind. But he was tired and worn threadbare that night, and the smallest thing had power to cut deep; in his morbid sensitiveness all talk of his brother's work in the mine seemed to cast a sort of slur upon himself—he a man of six feet two, and strong enough to wield a sledge hammer.

Mr. Crum turned the key in the cover of the desk. As he did so, he noted the jaded appearance of the face before him, so different from what it generally was.

"Why, Deering, you look beat out! What's the matter, man? You're not going to be sick now, just as I have a bit of news for you?"

Dorman rallied and said something about feeling a trifle out of sorts.

"The news I've got, then, will just come in play," said Mr. Crum, rubbing his hands, while his eyes could not suppress the twinkle in them.

"What is it?" said Dorman, straightening embarrassedly, like one caught sleeping at his post.

"Why, the company have made up their minds to ask a slight favor of Mr. Deering;" and again the twinkle.

"All right," said Dorman, in more of his usual business way, at the same time wondering at Mr. Crum's rather odd manner. Mr. Crum was a man Dorman never had just understood. What chance had he had to do so?

"Yes, we think it's right. Felton leaves us next week, I suppose you know?"

"Yes; so I heard."

"Heard who's to take his place?"

"Well," said Dorman, hesitating as to whether it was best to repeat here at headquarters what had been talked of among the men, "I have heard Mr. Grenshaw spoken of as likely to be the man."

"Yes, very likely. Grenshaw is not the man, however, though probably he would take the place if it were offered him. The company have the papers made for a very different candidate. Mr. Deering, allow me to congratulate you. The place is yours."

"But, Mr. Crum—" and then the color drifted from the rugged face, leaving it almost pitifully white.

Mr. Crum was sorry he had been so precipitate, and he turned away, that Deering might recover himself.

When he looked again Dorman was taking up his dinner-pail.

"Mr. Crum, you're sure there's no mistake? I wouldn't like the little fellow fooled."

"No mistake, no mistake, Mr. Deering. The thing has been as good as done for a week. It was understood that I was to let you know to-night. Didn't suppose it was going to be such a ticklish thing to do, though," and Mr. Crum laughed as his hand came down in friendly fashion on Dorman's shoulder.

"But Grenshaw's expecting it pretty certain," said Dorman.

"Well, he'll know better Monday."

"But I'm afraid the company have been coaxed into this," said Dorman, suspecting Mr. Avery's hand in it all.

"Well," said Mr. Crum genially, "perhaps there's no denying that you had a friend at court to speak a good word for you, but I look upon it as being rather of your own cutting and hewing after all. We do not work here with our eyes shut, and perhaps there's no harm in saying that men of good sturdy worth do not grow as thick as cactus plants here;" and again he laughed.

"I am sure, Mr. Crum, I hope the company will never have cause to regret it. I will do

the best I can to learn the business, and you will please say so for me to Mr. Bostwick."

"I shall be happy to do so," said Mr. Crum; and then he fell to talking of what would need to be seen to first, and of some minor items of business.

"Oh, Deering!" he called, as Dorman was about closing the door, "that cottage of Felton's, he asked me to tell you, is not taken yet. A good handy place."

"All right! I shall probably want it;" and Dorman was gone.

The wind was whistling among the branches of the piñons, tearing their cones from them and whirling them down defiantly, but Dorman heeded not, as over the dry pine needles and crackling twigs, through brambles and over bowlders, he made his way down to Dan. Daniel saw him coming, and something in the way Dorman tore along made the boy drop the

potato he was paring and run out to meet him.

"What is it, Dorm?" he cried, even before they came together. "Is it the mine?"

"All right!" was shouted back in the face of the wind; but when they met, Dorman only took hold of his little brother's hand and ran with him to the house.

"Now tell me," said Dan, gasping for breath, as he shut the door.

"It's too good to tell, Dan. It almost took me off my feet; you must stand stiff, and not go up."

"You ain't fooling me, are you, Dorm?" asked Dan wistfully.

"There! That's just what I asked the first thing; I couldn't bear that you should be fooled, lad."

"Me! It isn't anything to do with me, is it?" and Dan's face flushed a pretty pink. How his brother reveled at the sight!

"Why, yes: 'cause they've raised me, and what raises me, lifts you too, Dan."

"Oh, Dorm, have they raised you? How much?"

"Guess!"

But Dan could not guess. He only stood there with the color coming and going in his cheeks, and his eyes growing brighter each second.

"Well, I'll tell you, Dan; I'm to have Felton's place."

"You! Oh, you are fooling! Is it so?"

"Sure! Didn't I tell you it would be a stunner?" and Dorman turned to put away the dinner-pail, thinking now that he had no further use for it.

"But the men won't like it."

"Maybe not; can't say."

"And you'll wear a coat all the time, and do the bossing?"

"Shall begin on you the first thing, I reckon, and order you to leave the mines—won't have you round another day!" and Dorman tried to look fierce.

"But you won't make me leave you, Dorm?"

"Well, no—not yet awhile. I may have to do more ordering, though, and order you a horse to ride to school upon; and a new pair of shoes too—a fine, close-fitting pair like Mr. Crum's best; and a new suit—yes, I think there'll have to be a new suit ordered; and I guess there'll have to be a cap in the order too."

"But are you sure you'll have enough, Dorm? There's—Mary, you know."

"Never you fear, lad. There'll be enough for Mary, and for me to learn the ways of ordering on, too;" and Dorman caught his brother up and held him for a moment in his strong arms. "Eh, Dan, it's a grand time for us, I should say." Then his face grew tender and he turned and busied himself with the supper.

"Oh, Dorm, let's have eggs for supper! Mrs. Gibbs would as soon we'd have 'em as anybody, if we pay for 'em; and we can now, you know."

"All right; clip and get them. You can do 'most anything you like this night, I reckon."

"And may I tell?" asked Dan timidly; "they'll be awful glad to know it."

Dorman laughed. "Go ahead and do as you like, I say."

Dan dodged out, but soon dodged back again.

"Say, Dorm, couldn't I invite 'em down to supper? It would be so jolly to have company—just for this once, you know—and they're so kind of lonesome without Deb. Say yes, Dorm! There's some of the beans left to piece out with, and the rest of the honey on the top shelf."

"Oh, what a boy! Run along, and bring them on!"

The wonderful news brought Mr. Gibbs up standing at once, and he looked around eagerly for his cap even before Dan had time to deliver his invitation. And Mrs. Gibbs was so flustered that she had hardly heard it when—the door closing upon Mr. Gibbs, and then blowing open again—she turned to hear what it was Dan was saying about eggs and supper.

"Oh, yes, take 'em right along; never mind about countin' of 'em." And then, as she comprehended the honor done her family, her face flushed in warm motherliness, as she said, looking around for her hood, "Of course, just the thing! I'll take the chicken right along; it's all ready."

"But that won't be our supper," Dan protested.

"La, child! as though you wouldn't have had chicken if you'd known in time! Now bring the potatoes, too—they're all mashed ready; lucky I cooked plenty. To think of Dorman's being overseer! What will Deb say!" And the little woman turned to see if all was ready before they took up their line of march.

"I do say, Dorman," she said, bustling in with her steaming kettle of chicken smothered in gravy, "I couldn't be any more tickled if you were my own boys."

"I was telling Nancy t'other day I 'lowed as how you'd git a raise afore long, they were sending you here and there so. You've worked your way up mighty well, if I do say it. And the little chap ha'n't done so bad. Seein' him a-diggin' in so has often made me wonder how I would have felt if Deb had been a boy."

"Now, Clement!—and such a girl as our Deb is too!" and Mrs. Gibbs reached for a saucer in which to dish the chicken. "They write how Deb's going to school now, Dorm."

"Yes, holding her head right up, I s'pose, alongside o' the best of 'em!" and Mr. Gibbs rubbed his hands contentedly.

"It's a fine thing having her with the Averys," said Dorman, covering the tea with hot water and setting it upon the hot bricks to draw.

"You'll be sending Dan out that way now, I reckon?"

"Not just yet. With a good horse to ride, he can go to the village to school for awhile."

"Now, see here, friend Deering," said Mr. Gibbs alertly, "if you should be looking out for a horse for him, I 'low you'll look a long time afore you'll find a better saddle-horse than that gray o' mine; and I'm sure I'd as lief sell him to you as anyone I know of."

"There, now! Don't you go to trading horses when Dan here has invited us down to supper!" said Mrs. Gibbs, rather ashamed of her husband's quick eye to business. "I suppose you won't be living here much longer, Dorman."

"Well, no," said Dorman modestly, "Mr. Crum thinks he'll have to have me a little nearer. He says I can get Felton's cottage if I try for it."

"The one with the flowers, Dorm?" asked Dan eagerly.

Dorman nodded.

"Well, I'm sure it'll be awful lonesome not having you here; you don't know what a sight of comfort I've taken making bread for you; if you'd been my own boys—"

"Much you'd know about your own boys!" broke in her husband.

"There, Clement, I 'low you needn't be a runnin' o' me. I do say, Dorman, it'll be amazing dull with you gone. But I'm glad you've got the place."

CHAPTER XV.

RED TOP.

IT WAS a pretty room, and, opening right off the busy street, surprised you with its homeiness. In one of the tiniest of steel grates the red coals glowed, and, pushing their way persistently through the bars, now and then, with a soft tick, laid one of their number among the ashes beneath. On the marble mantel a clock across whose French glass door a spray of silvered lilies hung, sent out its voice from time to time, telling the hour; and as often as it did so, a parrot in its cage upon the upper shelf of the ivy-stand mimicked it derisively. A gentleman in a blue flannel blouse sat in front of one of the long windows, with an easel drawn up before him, on which rested a picture. A young woman occupied a low seat in the cleft of the other front window, and her head was bent over a photograph that rested face upwards in the palm of one hand, while the thumb and forefinger of the other grasped a long-handled brush dipped in india ink. "Brother and sister," you would have said at once, as your eye roamed from the red beard, red mustache, and well-nigh red hair of the gentleman, to where the bronze mass of curls and braids crowned the shapely head of the girl. But you would have been wrong: the two were husband and wife, each having done what they always had affirmed they never would do—marry a red-head. Poor things! But after all, they did not look as if they needed "pooring," as they sat absorbing the light from those two great windows.

"Aren't you ever going to have done fussing with that man's face?" says the gentleman, leaning back in his chair.

"'Tisn't any worse than sitting there staring at all the girls who pass," returns the other, dipping her brush into a little bottle of ink.

"Now, Bertha! After I've been so attentive all the month!"

"But, Ted, don't you think you have rather a way of staring? I used to think so when I went by."

"That's queer. I used to have the same idea about you."

"Ted, that's mean, when you know I used to go right by as though I hadn't an idea as to who lived here."

"How did you know I stared, then?"

Bertha laid her head back against the window and laughed a laugh that rippled her face into dimples such as had sent Mr. Thaddeus Downing fairly wild in the old days.

"But, Bertha, honestly, how many more are there of that man's photographs? You've been an unconscionably long time doing them."

"Have I? Good subject—splendid eyes; a little sorrowful, though."

"If you persist in looking into other men's eyes in that way, I sha'n't like it, Bertha—I shall not."

"Might tell Mr. Boreing that you prefer ladies' photos for your wife to retouch. It would show such a beautiful, loving trust!"

"I'm afraid we're going to find it a little hard to pull together."

Bertha hums a tune, then says abruptly, "Oh, Ted, let's have some muffins for supper!"

"And maple syrup?"

The young wife nods.

"All right, go ahead! But there comes Red Top."

"You are always looking out for that girl, Ted."

"But I tell you there is not one in a hundred of our city girls who walks like that."

Bertha turned. A young girl in a close-fitting rough-and-ready jacket, and around whose brown felt hat curled a scarlet feather, was coming down the street. A strap of books over her shoulder was held in place by one hand, while the other fell naturally at her side.

"Not a bend nor a quirk anywhere, but a poise and a spring that make you feel she could keep it up for all day," said Mr. Downing. "There! wouldn't I like to get her as she stands that way, her head half-turned, and the motion just stayed!"

Mrs. Downing seemed not to have heard her husband's rhapsody, but stood looking to see what had attracted the girl's attention. A boy was standing stretched on tiptoe upon a carriage block, holding in his hand an apple, which a smaller boy was making vain attempts to reach. Twice had the smaller boy sprung, and twice had the larger lad doubled up with derisive merriment at the other's failure. The girl in passing had evidently not been noticed by the two lads. As the boy suspended the apple for the third time, she took a few steps back, made a spring, caught the apple, and almost before the owner of the fruit realized what was happening, the teeth of the smaller boy were plunging exultantly into it.

"Wasn't that well done, though!" and Thaddeus Downing leaned back and laughed.

"Didn't make much fuss about it," said Bertha, laughing also.

The girl in question, having passed from the Downings' sight, walked for a few blocks further down the same street and then, turning into a broader avenue, passed up the steps of a brownstone house, fitted her key, and went in.

"You can't think who's here!" And a girl several years younger, whose eyes were as blue as her dress, stretched her arms across the hall to bar the way.

"Nor I don't care, either."

Hearing the girl in brown speak, a listener might have felt a shock, the voice was so grim, so well-nigh harsh, for one so daintily dressed.

"Oh, but you do, though!" said the other girl, breaking into a laugh.

A rich color swept into the dark face of the older girl, and laying her hand almost roughly on the other's shoulder, she said:

"It can't be from home?"

"But it is, though;" and the girl in blue led her companion toward the parlor door, saying, "Here she is," and pulled her to a corner where a dark-haired man was talking to a lady whom you would have known at once to be the younger girl's mother.

"Well, Deb," said the gentleman, rising a little awkwardly, but smiling genially, "I'm glad to see you looking so well. Really, I don't believe I should have known you."

"Nor I you," said the girl, looking the gentleman up and down, at which he blushed slightly as he again seated himself.

"We'll leave Deborah and you to visit by yourselves for awhile," said the lady, rising and holding out her hand to her daughter, who looked as though she would much rather stay. "You must make him tell you all you want to know, Deb."

"Oh, Dorm, tell me how they all are," said the girl, dropping on to a low seat and tearing off her hat and jacket.

"All well. Foxes as fat as butter, your father says."

"Rowly and Towley—bless 'em!" and the girl laughed, and by the laugh the face was transformed. But the next moment the brightness was gone, and the face was wearing its old look of depression. "And so you've got to be boss now and gone to the mine to live?" said the girl in an oddly old way.

"Yes. Quite a step up, wasn't it? Nice for Dan."

"Mother says you've bought the gray for him to ride to school. My! Dan must feel big! Why, that was the very best horse father ever had!"

There was no soft "papa" or "mamma" falling from this girl's lips, but a plain, ungilded "father" and "mother" every time. But this seemed in keeping with her personality, save perhaps for the dainty and carefully fashioned garments, which appeared to belong more to the rich furnishings of the room where the two were seated, than to the wearer.

"And does Dan like it there now?"

"I think so. Dan's always quiet, you know. He's pitching into his books like a good fellow."

"What brought you here?"

"Some machinery they are having built. But Deb,"—and Dorman leaned slightly forward and dropped his voice—"how goes it here?"

Every particle of eager light died out of the girl's face as the question was asked, and dropping her elbows upon her lap and resting her chin in her palms, she said, "It's no go." Then she added a little regretfully, "But it's the first thing I ever had to give up to—you know that."

"You don't pretend to say you're going to give it up and go back?"

The girl nodded, with her eyes raised to the other's face.

"But why, Deb?"

"I can't stand it here!"

"But it looks nice," said Dorman, glancing around the room.

"Oh, it's well enough here at the house,

but we're never at home, and outside it's straitened and cramped—a narrow line just so, and if you step over it you're nowhere and nobody. I should die here; I haven't had a long, free breath since I came."

"But don't you think you'll get used to it after awhile?"

The girl shook her head, and then, throwing her hands into her lap, she said hotly:

"It's just show and sham; you get right down to the bottom of it as quick as that!" and she snapped her thumb and finger contemptuously. "The one who can dress the finest, and talk the biggest, and lie the fastest, gets ahead." And having thus spoken, she rose, with heightened color, picked up her hat and jacket, and abruptly left the room.

An amused, pained look settled upon Dorman's face as he found himself alone. But when he saw the girl in blue standing in the doorway, it vanished, and he held his hand out to her. The girl flitted to his side, and as he made room for her on the arm of his easy-chair, said, as with her arm thrown over the back of it she swayed to and fro by touching the toes of her shoes to the carpet:

"And now tell me about Dan. He's just happy all day, is he not, now?"

"Yes; jolly as a magpie."

"Oh! and you have the magpies yet?"

"Yes."

"And Dan goes to school?"

"Yes."

"Deb goes too."

The gentleman nodded, but said nothing. He hardly knew what to say, after what Deborah herself had said.

"Do you know, Mr. Deering, I don't think Deb is very happy with us."

"Indeed?" Mr. Deering said quietly, not wishing to scare away the girl's confidence.

"No; it's all so different from her life in the mountains. It frets her, having to mind things so. She never says much, though—Deb doesn't, you know."

"Do you think she's homesick?"

"I'm sure she is. The other day we came home from school by the market down by the river, and there was a dead deer by the door,—the hair all on, and the eyes wide open and kind of pitiful-like—and Deb could hardly get by it. She pretended her shoe wanted fixing, and when she stooped, she laid her hand down on the deer, and pressed it hard, like that;" and Maybelle laid her little hand upon Mr. Deering's knee to illustrate. "And when she went on, I saw her lip tremble, and at the corner she looked back and said, 'The deer must be coming to the spring up in the gulch to drink, now the creeks are frozen.' Do the deer come to the spring then, to drink?"

"Yes; when the ice is over the creeks."

Here Mr. Avery came in to welcome Mr. Deering, and Mrs. Avery and Benny soon followed, so the conversation became general.

It was not until they gathered in the dining-room, Benny in his high-chair and Genevieve in her place beside her sister, and Mr. Deering in the place next the one Deb was to occupy, that Deborah herself made her appearance. And then she was diffident, and no coaxing could draw her out of her shell.

"I was really glad to hear of your promotion, Mr. Deering," Mr. Avery said cordially as conversation began to flow.

"I have always laid it in a great measure to your influence, Mr. Avery," said Dorman Deering.

"Well, the word I spoke for you may have helped others to see with clearer vision," said Mr. Avery kindly; "but after all, it was your own good square blows that did the work."

And then the conversation turned upon the mine and business.

It was after the six o'clock dinner when—Mrs. Avery having excused herself for awhile, and Mr. Avery being detained in the library

with a caller—Dorman found himself again alone with Deborah.

"Now, Deb, you'll take back all that about going home?" he said, drawing the girl down kindly beside him upon the couch. "You know that father and mother of yours are

bound up in the idea of your making something extra of yourself."

"But they don't know anything about it. There isn't any making something of yourself. It's just a frittering of your time away on what doesn't amount to a row of pins."

"But I don't understand quite what it is that gives you all this trouble."

"The folks. They care so much about things you don't care a fig for. You mustn't do this, and you mustn't do that, and it's 'Deb, do,' and it's 'Deb, don't,' till I grow beside myself, being so hunted down and watched. It just seems as though, if I could shake them all off, and get out on the rocks back of the house at home, and yell for half an hour, I might be able to stand it again." Then she added, her impatience ebbing, while she spoke a trifle brokenly, "And I thought I could stand anything, Dorm—that I didn't care, you know. I didn't think I could mind anything so much." And a tear—a strange thing for Deborah Gibbs—rolled slowly from under her lashes, and coursed undisturbed down her cheek, dropping upon her hand.

"But, Deb," said her companion, leaning back and looking at the girl steadily, "if you felt sure it was the only way to get at what you want—that something good and grand was to grow out of it all—then you could bear it, could you not?"

"But there won't, Dorm. There won't anything come of it. Some folks are made one way, and some another; and there's no making yourself different than you were made. Now there's Maybelle—she couldn't be anything but Maybelle if she should try. Everybody just worships her, and she doesn't think anything of it. But when folks are not made so, they're not. I was a fool for trying, that's all."

"But, Deb, you can't tell. Now when Dan and I were down in the mines digging away, we did not know as anything better was coming. We thought it awful hard, and we fretted because it was small pay, and because there wasn't much to eat, and because the boots were going fast. And then, as quick as that, there I was raised to manager, with money to pay my debts, and some for my pocket, and Dan riding over the country on one of the best of nags. It had been coming all the time, only we didn't know it." And then he added in a softer tone, "We'd have been more patient and brave in those days, Deb, if we had known. And now we wish we had been, even though we didn't know; it would have shown more of a true, brave spirit, you see." He took the slim, brown hand resting beside him, and stroked it helpfully. "There is much worth having that you wish for, Deb, and that you can't get back in those rough, bare mountains; you know that." Then he changed his voice slightly and added, "I'm a little afraid you don't just realize what a rare chance is given to you—don't quite appreciate it. Do you ever stop to think how hard the money was got at first that your father is spending on you now? Suppose that in the early days when your father first settled among the mountains, he had said, 'No use; some folks can get, and some folks can't,' and had been content to drift along? Do you think that if he had done that way you would be to-day living here on the top shelf, dressed like a lady, and not a thought of where it all comes from, to trouble you? There is not much worth the having that is got in any other way than by working for it, Deb."

Deborah sighed. "I didn't think I could find anything hard again, after getting to the top of that mountain, Dorm."

"And this is the girl who climbed so then!" said Mr. Deering, looking down upon the depressed face before him.

"But it's all so different here."

"But it's the same girl."

"I don't feel the same. I don't know myself here! I didn't suppose I could feel so—well, so as though I didn't know beans."

Dorman laughed. "Oh, you'll get over that when you come to know the folks better."

"Know 'em!" said Deb sarcastically; "I know 'em well enough now." Then, giving the chair she was tilting a push, she said, "You ought to hear what the folks tell about us when they get back. Pretty as peaches out there to our faces, but you ought to hear them run on about our sod roofs and bedsteads out in the front yards, when they get back here."

Deborah's companion flushed, and he gave a slight toss of his head as he said with a short laugh, "Oh, well, I guess you and I can stand that, can't we? We're used to gnats, you know."

"But it's mean of them to come spying on us, and then make fun of how we live!"

Unfortunately, at the very outset of Deborah's stepping out from her old, free mountain-life into the strangely restricted one of the city, her ears had been too sharp for her comfort.

Coming back as she did with the Averys, when their numerous friends flocked in with their hundred-and-one questions—many of them harmless in themselves, and none of them intended to slant toward the strange girl Mrs. Avery had brought with her—there was hardly an hour of the day but something was dropped concerning what had been seen and heard during their sojourn in the land of the stranger, which tore its way raspingly into the heart of the proud girl. Naturally sensitive almost to morbidness, she took less heed of the praises poured upon Colorado's matchless mountains, her clear, dazzling atmosphere, her grand views and indescribable cañons, than upon what was dropped concerning the daily life of those who lived there. The sunbonnets of the women, the bare feet of the ranchmen out among the irrigating ditches, the big talk of the coach-drivers, the fever of the prospectors—all these subjects suddenly bristled with jagged points for the girl whose homesick heart was even then turned that way. Once

Deborah had heard Mr. Avery say to Miss Blossom, who came down dressed in a new costume, "I 'low as how my gal can hold her head up alongside of the best on 'em;" and then as Miss Blossom laughed, he added, "And git 'most any kind of a backin'." Had the voice and words been less like those of her father than Mr. Avery made them, Deborah would have recognized them; and standing in the shadow of the balcony, with their echo ringing in her ears, she felt a flame of anger rush over her, which finally died down into a sullen fire, nursed and tended. Mr. Avery would have gone far to serve the girl who was now with them, but unknowingly he had crippled his own usefulness: thus do we often defeat our own kind intentions.

"Oh, well, lass, we must not expect to have it all our own way," said Mr. Deering. "Besides, we must not overlook all the kindness, and hold only to the jangling things. Now there's Maybelle—"

"Maybelle's an angel, that's what she is!" said Deborah, breaking in, and then adding, "How she can stand it to call that Genie sister is more than I can see; and as to Paul—I wouldn't own such a little sly—"

"There, there, Deborah! That will never do," said Mr. Deering; adding in a lighter tone, "We shall have our hands full if we have to carry along with us not only this family, but all the aunts and cousins." Rising, he threw himself into an easy-chair in front of the grate, and seemed lost in thought. At last he said:

"I wish your mother was here, Deborah."

"There, now!" said the girl, moving to take the place Dorman had vacated, "don't you go to bringing mother in; if I can't fight my own battles it's a pity." And then, as though the thought had just come to her, "Now, don't you go to telling them at home what I've said. I won't have them bothered with it! When I can't stand it, I'll put back home; and you won't know long beforehand about my coming, either."

"You must give up that idea of coming back. Your father's heart is fixed on your staying and making something of yourself."

To this Deb made no further reply than an impatient gesture. With head bent slightly forward, Dorman Deering sat, his hands resting in his lap, and his eyes fixed upon the coals. The fire died out of the face of his companion, as, swinging a small sofa-cushion to and fro, she watched him a little curiously. At last, dropping her chin into one of her slender palms, and leaning upon the cushion, she looked across to the one in front of her, and said in an even tone:

"Do you believe it'll amount to much—my staying?"

Dorman turned, and with a voice threaded with impatience said:

"You have the chance of a hundred, Deborah. There's money by the thousands waiting for you, a father and mother who dote on you, and friends and brains to be had for the using. What more you want I can't for the life of me see. But I'm disappointed. You don't seem the girl I took you to be."

There was the sound of a door opening and shutting, voices in the hall, and Mr. and Mrs. Avery entered, followed by Maybelle. The conversation thus broken in upon was not again renewed, and at an early hour Mr. Deering left, promising to drop in again as soon as his business in a different part of the city would admit.

CHAPTER XVI.

DEB'S RIDE.

"THERE'LL be plenty of coasting tomorrow," said Genevieve Avery, slipping into her place at the dinner-table. "I'm awfully glad it's Saturday."

"That makes me think, papa," said Maybelle, "my sled was spoiled last year. And Deb'll have to have one too."

"I suppose Deb'll beat us all coasting," said Genie.

"Coasting! What's that?"

"Don't you know what coasting is?"

"No, I don't," said Deb, reaching for the mustard.

"Why, yes," said Maybelle. "Going downhill on your sled."

"Ho! Why couldn't you say sliding downhill, and be done with it?" said Deb.

Mr. Avery laughed.

"They have to varnish everything here, Deborah."

Deb said nothing, only spread a thick coating of mustard over a slice of cheese, and, placing it carefully between two thin pieces of bread, began eating with relish. These cheese sandwiches were a source of great comfort to Deb—about the only thing she could have exactly as at home.

As the girls were at their books that evening, the door-bell rang. They listened.

"It's Paul—I know by the way he slam-bangs," said Maybelle; and then she added, "I don't see how auntie stands it to have him around all the time."

Here their door opened.

"Oh, how poky!—at your books Friday night! My Saturday begins at sundown Friday, I can tell you that!"

"And how about Monday?" asked Genevieve, who was beginning to take some pride in her standing at school.

"Oh, I squeeze through!"

"Some folks can squeeze through a mighty small place when they try," said Deborah contemptuously.

"And who asked for your opinion?" demanded Paul hotly. "If you knew what the boys say about you—jumping on to the street-cars while they are going, and all that tomboyishness—you wouldn't carry your head so high when you pass the academy, but would go some other way."

Deborah's eyes flashed fire.

"Now, Deb, don't!" said Maybelle, beseech-

ingly; "mamma says we're always quarreling when Paul is here."

"And so we are, now she's come," said Paul. "Mother does not like me to come here now; but I don't like to slight you and Genie —my own cousins."

"Too bad mamma can't come with Paulie, so he won't get harm done to him!" said Deb mockingly.

If there was a word Paul Greyson hated, it was "Paulie"—the one his mother used so often—and now he bounced up and crowded on his cap in a hurry.

"I came to tell you what fine coasting they are making out on the hill; but there's no peace to be had in this house now."

"Are they all out?" asked Maybelle eagerly.

"The hill's alive with them. They've got it as smooth as glass, clear from Summit street down Winchester."

"Oh, won't we have fun to-morrow! Do go, Paul, so we can get our lessons through, and have nothing tagging us to-morrow," said Maybelle, hastily turning to her books.

Paul went out.

"I just hate that boy!" Deb muttered, bending over her slate.

"You seem to forget he's our cousin," said Genie, always glad of an opportunity to show a little of the young lady. She was three years older than her sister, though at one time you would hardly have thought it, and this winter she was shooting up wonderfully.

"You can have him for a cousin, for all of me!" said Deborah.

"Please don't, Deb!" came from Maybelle's end of the table; and the girls settled again to work.

It was directly after breakfast the next morning that Maybelle and Deb prepared to go with Mr. Avery to select their sleds.

"You must come back for your caps and mittens before going to the hill!" Mrs. Avery called, as the two girls dashed down the steps to overtake Mr. Avery.

"Which one will you have?" that gentleman asked, as a few moments later they stood with sleds of all kinds displayed for selection.

"Oh, let me have that one!" said Maybelle, pointing to a pure white sled, whose spider-like runners ended in a swan's head.

"H'm!" said Deb. "None of that kind for me. Haven't you any low ones?"

"Plenty, Miss;" and reaching under the counter the clerk hauled out a sharp-nosed, red pointer.

"That's the kind," said Deb.

"You mean business," said Mr. Avery, laughing.

"I'll show 'em!" said Deb.

A rope having been fastened to each of the purchases, the two girls started homeward, dragging their sleds after them.

"There goes Red Top with a red sled," said Mr. Downing a few minutes later, as he saw the two going by. "She's got a girl in blue with her—not a bad-looking one, either. I wonder if she knows that white sled is just in keeping with her?"

"Oh, Ted, how you do notice everything!" said his wife, who was putting the finishing touches to the room before going out to make cookies—Ted so loved something to nibble when painting.

As soon as the caps and mittens were on, the girls started off, Genie having gone in advance with Rose Graham. Deb had caught her first inspiration since coming to the city. Only the morning before had the snow fallen, and this was the first vista which had opened in her strange life that was in the least tempting. Perhaps Genie's words of the night before had not been without their effect—the suggestion that Deb would probably beat them all. Deb had felt herself so snubbed and crowded back by the city schoolgirls, that it was only natural she should suddenly feel a tingling desire to surpass them in something. "If there's a girl there that dares go down faster'n I, I'd like to have her show herself!" she muttered as she fastened on her red cap.

It was with a brightly beaming face she waited for Maybelle; and when a moment later Mrs. Avery watched the red and the blue caps out of sight, she thought, "I have not seen Deb seem so happy since she came."

It was with quickly-beating hearts that the two happy girls pushed their way in among the throng which crowded Summit street, for this, the first coasting of the season.

"Oh, you've come, have you?" said Carrie Erskine, slipping her arm through Maybelle's. "Genie said you'd gone for your sleds. What a beauty! Oh, Deb, why didn't you get one like Maybelle's? Hers is so much prettier!"

"What are looks?" said Deb, in her blunt way.

"Can you coast?" asked Lottie Phelps of Deborah.

"I'll show you, if they ever give me a chance," said Deb, waiting for the boys to push off a heavily-loaded sled. And then, suiting the action to the words, she caught up her own as the others went down, ran for a few steps, and then, dropping with it and upon it, shot down head-first, boy-fashion.

"Did you ever in your life!" came from the girls, as Deb departed in so unexpected a fashion.

A hoot of derision arose from the boys on the big sled, as Deb, having gained upon it, shot by them with a wave of her hand; and the yell was taken up along the line in reckless fashion as the red cap and sled in the center of a little cloud of snow sped on.

Thaddeus Downing turned from his easel to see what the sport was. A very good view the Downings had of the coasting-ground, as Winchester street swept down into their own.

"Oh, Bertha, do come quick!" he called to the little woman busy in the kitchen.

His wife hurried forward.

"You're too late. If that was not rich!" and overgrown Ted laughed uproariously.

"What was it?"

"Oh, it was a girl going pellmell downhill, regular boy-fashion, head-first, and coming out ahead of them all! I wonder if she did it for a wager?"

"Was it the girl with a red sled?"

"I believe so. At any rate, she had on a red cap."

"Well, the girls are giving it to her now, to pay for it. Just see them make their heads go!"

"I'll warrant! You don't catch women folks not jabbing in the pins if any one of their own number comes out ahead. Why, bless me, Bertha, it's Red Top!"

"Sure enough! I didn't know her without the red feather."

"We might have known there wasn't another girl who could do such a thing. How she is catching it though, now! Bertha, do go out and rap those girls' heads for me."

"Do it yourself. You've been aching for an encounter with Red Top."

Deborah was indeed having quite a serious time of it. Not having waited to see how the other girls went down, and knowing nothing of sliding down hill save as connected with the two-mile stretches back of her home in the mountains, with no other company than the rocks echoing her own voice, she only felt a keen tingle of delight at the sensation she was creating when the merry crowd sent up their shout as she dashed down; and when, picking herself up, she readjusted her cap and looked around, she was quite astounded by the angry crowd of girls about her.

Genie and Rose Graham had just passed down as Deborah arrived at the coast, and were turning for the long return trip as she reached the bottom.

"Deb Gibbs, you've just disgraced the whole family! I'll never be seen on the street with you again as long as I live!" exclaimed Genevieve, angry tears springing to her eyes as the last jeer of the crowd died away. "To think of you making a spectacle of yourself like that!"

"It's just what you might expect from her," said Rose Graham, whom Deb had shocked regularly, in some way, every school-day since she had been one of their number.

"You won't hear the last of it from the boys for one while—I can tell you that," a tall girl in gray added severely.

It was Sue Wilkins, and Deborah detested Sue Wilkins. "She's always saying she knows what she don't know," Deb often affirmed.

"I'd just like to know what it is so very awful I've done now," said Deb.

"What have you not done, you'd better say," said Rose.

"She's spoiled all my fun for to-day," said Genevieve. "It will be one while before I shall feel like looking anybody in the face again!"

"I do wish some of you'd explain," said Deborah, too mystified to be as angry as she otherwise might have been at these stabs.

"Why couldn't you have come down in a decent way, like the rest of us?" said Rose. "Look at Maybelle now—see how beautifully she rides!"

Turning, Deborah saw Maybelle gliding down toward them, and as she watched her sitting gracefully upon her sled, her form slightly thrown forward, one hand grasping the runner, the other resting in her lap, while one foot projected from under her carefully adjusted skirts to do the steering, and then, looking around, saw that all the girls were seated in precisely the same way, it came to Deb in some measure how her reckless, headlong rush had appeared. A deep red surged in a sullen tide from neck to temples, and without a word she turned, plunged through the snow piled against the curbing, and, scrambling on to the pavement, made her way toward home.

"There, Bertha!" called Thaddeus Downing to his wife, who had run to see if the cookies were burning. "They've routed her; she is coming back. My! doesn't she look mad, though! Wouldn't I like her picture now! But it's a tearing shame!"

Bertha was back by the window now, one cooky answering for two.

Straight home went Deborah, and slam went the red sled under the front steps. Looking out of the dining-room, Mrs. Avery saw Deb making her way upstairs.

"Why, Deb, what are you home so early for?"

Not a word said Deb; straight on up the stairs she pursued her way.

"Deb?" called Mrs. Avery after her.

"Yes'm."

"I thought you liked sliding down hill?"

"Sliding down hill, I should say!" threw back the girl. "Dressed up so you'd never dream what they were getting at! Just show and sham!"

Mrs. Avery sighed, but made no further effort to detain the strange girl, who seemed so determined to grasp things by the wrong handle.

A little before eleven the white sled rested beside the red one, and Maybelle stood warming over the register.

"Where's Genevieve?" asked her mother.

"Coming."

Mrs. Avery said no more. She could see by Maybelle's looks that something more than usual had gone wrong that morning, but she was wise enough to know that disclosures were best unsought.

"I do wish, mamma, we were not obliged to have Deb with us always!"

It was something new for Maybelle to complain; had it been Genevieve, Mrs. Avery would not have wondered. But she only said quietly: "You would not have her going off by herself, would you?"

"She might as well; she never has a good time with us. I do think it was too bad of her to-day—it just spoiled everything!"

"But was Deb to blame?"

"Of course she was! She knew better; she

just did it to bother us—Carrie says she did."

"But I do not understand about it, dear."

"Why, didn't Deb come home?"

"Yes, but I did not press her into telling why she came."

"Well, what do you think she did, mamma, the very first thing, as soon as she got to the hill?" said Maybelle, dropping down beside her mother's mending-basket, and seeming on the whole rather glad that it had fallen to her to tell the tale. "She just threw herself on that low sled of hers, and went tearing along down the hill like a boy, head-first."

"Is that all?" said Mrs. Avery, looking as though she were quite inclined to laugh, but hardly knew whether it was best.

"All! I guess you'd say all, if you had heard the boys along the line yell!" answered Maybelle; then, catching sight of the suppressed twinkle in her mother's eyes, she added in an aggrieved way, "I wouldn't think, mamma, you'd feel like laughing over such a thing. You wouldn't like Genie or me to do it."

"No, dear," said the mother, her voice trembling slightly; "I wouldn't, because you both know better. But really, Maybelle, I do not believe Deb had the slightest idea she was doing anything out of the way. She's very sensitive about appearing odd. How she must have looked, tearing along the avenue!" And now, in spite of her efforts, Mrs. Avery laughed till the tears came.

"It was just awful!" said Maybelle, though she too laughed a little, in sympathy with her mother.

"But what brought Deb to a realizing sense of what she had done?" Mrs. Avery asked, wiping away the tears with the stocking she was mending.

"Why, you see the boys hooted over it so; and then the girls, I guess, pitched into her pretty hard. I wasn't there when she got down, but Genie and Rose Graham were, and a lot of others, and I think they gave it to her good, for she came off home."

"Poor Deb!" said Mrs. Avery, still laughing.

"But, mamma, you don't seem to mind Genie and me a bit," said Maybelle, slowly unwinding and winding her mother's cotton. "It isn't a bit pleasant to always have such a girl with us. The boys were all talking about it. And after she was gone, some of them 'd call out to know if 'Red Sled was going again.' I stood it as long as I could, and then Carrie and I went to the park to slide. But there was only a lot of little boys coasting there."

"Such things are rather hard," said the mother, tucking the girl down beside her in the ample rocker and swaying to and fro with her.

This comforted Maybelle somewhat, and at last she said:

"Of course if Deb didn't know there was any other way to do, that makes a difference," and she heaved a sigh.

"I am quite sure you will never be troubled by her going down that way again," said Mrs. Avery; and even as she spoke, her lips parted in a smile.

Maybelle's curiosity led her, as soon as her mother left the room to see about luncheon, to run upstairs and spy out the land. She found Deb in one of the windows of the little sitting-room which the three girls occupied in common, having sleeping-rooms out of it. In the street below the sleighs were flashing by, everyone eagerly making the most of the first sleighing of the season.

Deb flushed as Maybelle entered, and turned her face toward the window. Maybelle crossed to her and looked out also.

"They look pretty, don't they?" she said.

"Yes," answered Deb faintly, and something resembling a sigh fluttered out.

But look as closely as she might, Maybelle could see no trace of Deb's having cried—she had yet to learn that Deb was one who could indulge for a half-hour in that luxury and show no sign thereof. But Maybelle could see plainly that Deb was anything but happy, and looking down on the dark face, she felt herself growing sorry for her.

At last Deb, not turning her gaze from the street, said:

"I s'pose you feel awful about it."

"About what?" said Maybelle very foolishly, pretending not to know just what they were both thinking of.

"Oh, you know. What's the use of pretending? What did your mother say?"

"She didn't seem to think it was much; she just laughed at it."

There was a pause. At last Deb said, turning and looking at Maybelle:

"I wouldn't have done it for anything if I'd known."

"Of course not!" said Maybelle; "everyone knows that."

But when Genevieve learned, from a few whispered words of Maybelle's when her mother was not present, that Deb didn't mean any harm and so on, the older, in schoolgirl vernacular, was "perfectly disgusted," and declared that "Maybelle would swallow a camel if anybody wanted her to."

CHAPTER XVII.

THADDEUS MAKES A MOVE.

"THAT'S a mighty good run Jimmy's getting out there! 'Most makes me sigh to be a boy again!" And Mr. Downing set a heaped scuttle of coal behind the shiny little range.

"Do you know, Ted, I can't help thinking how Red Top would enjoy clipping down there," said his wife.

"My! wouldn't she, though! If I see her, Bertha, I believe I'll invite her to make use of it!"

"You'd better look out, or you may get snubbed;" and Mrs. Downing slipped one of the cakes from her fingers into the porcelain

kettle of hot fat. A little later Mr. Downing called:

"As sure as you live, Bertha, she's coming down the street now. Would you?"

"Yes, if you dare!" said his wife, laughing merrily.

The next moment a current of cold air pouring upon her slippered feet—she would persist in wearing slippers in winter, after the manner of all wives until their husbands teach them better—told Mrs. Downing that the front door was open, so, setting back the kettle, she dodged behind the wide crack of the parlor door to see what was going on. Her husband was standing in the front door, the wind blowing out the ends of his flannel coat, and giving rather a grotesque look to his hair. Bertha could not resist a laugh.

"Bertha, don't! She'll hear you; she's almost here."

The next Bertha heard was "Good-morning!" from her husband.

Now Deb Gibbs had not been so short a time in the city as not to know that in general middle-aged men do not stand in open doors on a cold morning simply to say good-morning to whomsoever passes, so now she stared, then half-nodded, and then stared again.

"This is a nice morning for coasting," Bertha heard her husband say. She could not hear whether the girl made any reply—and indeed for a moment Deb did not speak, but stood there with head held high. Then she snapped out:

"I don't coast—here, sir!"

Coasting was something to which Deborah Gibbs could hear not the slightest allusion these days without her head going up and her face flaming—which was the only notice she had taken of late when the subject was dragged up by any of her schoolfellows. Deb had heard enough of coasting. But poor Thaddeus, not knowing the dangerous ground he had stepped upon, was a trifle nonplussed at the result of his advances, so friendly in their intent, and his wife heard him say:

"You needn't fire up so! I only noticed you did not use the hill now, that was all."

Evidently the girl was moving on, for Mrs. Downing noticed her husband spoke louder as he added, "There's no occasion to be angry about it."

Mrs. Downing stuffed her apron into her mouth and exclaimed under her breath, "I told him he'd get snubbed!" And then she listened to catch her husband's next words:

"It's a splendid hill, and my wife says she is perfectly willing you should use it."

"Oh, the traitor!" said Mrs. Downing behind the door, "to lay it all on me. I'll pay him for it!"

Here she saw the gleam of a red feather, and heard the words, "I'll never slide with them again."

"It was only because you came out ahead, that's all," said Mr. Thaddeus, while his wife back of him ejaculated, "Taffy—that is!"

"I don't see anything of the hill," said Deb.

"No; it slopes right down from our back yard. Come and see."

Mrs. Downing had only time to dodge back to her frying-kettle before the door swung open, and her husband, with an air of triumph, came in, with the girl following. He flashed a look of triumph at his wife as he laid his hand upon the side door; but her face expressed nothing.

With the kitchen to herself again, she found her cakes demanding attention, so she refrained from looking through the side window to oversee the case further. But as the moments flew, she wondered how her husband could stand it out there so long without his hat. At last the two returned, and the stranger, with "I'll be back in a minute," dodged out of the front door, leaving it open behind her.

"My goodness, Bertha, what a voice!" said Mr. Downing, coming back from shutting the door, and spreading his hands over the range.

"She's as homely as a hedge fence," said his wife teasingly.

"Her voice is the worst. I never was so taken back in my life. I thought it would be bright and ringing. It was as gruff as a farm hand's."

"I'd like to know what under the sun possessed you to lay it all on me, Ted, inviting her in?" said Mrs. Downing, hanging the kettle in the storeroom.

"But I had to say something, Bertha, with her standing there glaring at me. Besides, I could hear you every single time you laughed."

"Well, I warned you that you might get snubbed," said Bertha.

"Oh, she's all right, now she understands it!" said Mr. Downing, helping himself to cakes.

"Well, if she is not, don't you bring me in again. Mind, I won't have anything to do with what comes of it. If she makes herself troublesome, you've got to be the one to shake her off, Ted."

Here a bump against the front door announced the fact that their visitor and sled had made their appearance, and as the girl burst in, her face was so eager and bright under the red cap which had taken the place of the hat, that Thaddeus wondered why his wife thought her homely.

"You can come in with Jimmie and warm yourself when you get cold," said Mrs. Downing, smiling upon the glowing face.

"'If she gets to be troublesome here,'" said her husband, imitating his wife's voice of a few moments previous, and closing the side door, which had been left open instead of the front one this time, "'you will have to be the one to shake her off.'" Then he added, "I don't see what you want to call her homely for, Bertha."

"I thought she was, before I saw her smile. But I don't see anything so bad about her voice. It had a very happy ring in it when she said she guessed she shouldn't mind the cold."

"I wonder where she's from. She never grew in these parts," said Thaddeus, taking a doughnut.

"That's the third, besides the ones you've taken when my back was turned," said his wife; adding, "What a pretty jacket that is of hers! What a queer mother she must have, to take so much pains with her clothes, and then leave her without any bringing-up! You've got to shut the door after her, Ted."

"All right," said her husband, going back to his painting.

The kitchen had been aired from the odor of doughnuts, and Mrs. Downing was busy arranging to the very best advantage the rather small supply of silver upon the round table in the dining-room, when Deb, dragging her sled, brought herself alongside the glowing range, and flooded the kitchen with cold air from the door back of her.

"Had a good time?" asked Mrs. Downing, stepping to close the door, in her hand a platter which held a cold chicken.

"If we haven't, we needn't ever expect to," said Deb, blowing on her fingers.

Mrs. Downing smiled, and, lifting the plate of browned cakes, said:

"Won't you have a doughnut?"

Deborah took a good-sized one, and, biting into it, said, with her mouth rather unnecessarily full:

"Your father hasn't a shovel, has he?"

It was Mrs. Downing's turn to hear suppressed laughter in the rear, and her features twitched as she said, "My husband, I suppose you mean. Yes, he has one he shovels coal with."

"My!" said Deb. "I thought you were a girl."

Thaddeus leaned low over his easel, saying gleefully, "Doesn't that tickle her, though! She'll have Bertha now, after that."

"I'm not very old," Mrs. Downing said, plunging her knife into the brown breast of the chicken.

"Oh, of course not!" commented Mr. Downing over his picture. "Just a little dot of a thing. I wonder if mother knows about it all?"

"But he looks like you. Your hair's both red."

"There, she has done it now! What will Bertha say to that! She'll make me shut the door after her now." And then he waited. Had he known it, his wife was trying to recover herself in the dining-room. At last he heard her say:

"Most people think we look alike."

"But he must be a sight older'n you."

"Well, yes; he's thirty-five."

"There, right out with it!" said the artist, dabbing the green foliage of his picture. But the next moment he exploded outright as he heard the girl exclaim:

"You don't pretend to say he's thirty-five years older than you are!"

Hearing her husband's laugh, Mrs. Downing laughed too, long and merrily.

"What a funny child you are!" she said. And then, turning to her husband, who now appeared in the doorway, she asked, "Do you know, she thought I said you were thirty-five years the older!"

"Well, it's no wonder, when you tried to make out you were so very young!" was the reply.

But their visitor, having finished her cake, picked up her sled-rope, and, drawing on her mittens, pushed by Mr. Downing to the front door.

"What's your name?" asked Mrs. Downing.

"Deb Gibbs," threw back the girl, without turning her head.

"You must be sure to come again," said Mrs. Downing, still laughing.

Both the Downings broke into the merriest of laughter as the door was fairly closed upon their visitor.

"But that was mean of you, Bertha, to tell my age," said Mr. Downing.

"You tell mine whenever you get a chance, Ted," answered his wife. "I heard you telling Mr. Pomeroy the other night, and heard the rest of it too—how you 'took me early, so as to bring me up well.' Just as though my mother couldn't do that! Mother wouldn't like that if she knew it, Thaddeus."

"But it was because I loved you so, that I took you."

"Oh, I don't mind the taking," said his wife, filling a small pitcher with cream. "It's your boasting of the object you had in doing so."

"But I must have had an object, or I wouldn't have been bothered with you."

Mrs. Downing pulled out the chair in her husband's place at the table, by way of answer, and Mr. Downing was only too glad to know luncheon was ready.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LEFT.

"WHY, it seems Mr. Deering has returned home!" said Mrs. Avery, glancing at an open letter in her hand, as she leaned back in her chair at the breakfast-table.

"Is that so?" said her husband. "That's too bad! I wanted to talk over some things with him." And Mr. Avery broke an egg into his glass.

"He says he was called back unexpectedly," continued Mrs. Avery, glancing at the letter. "I meant to have consulted him about Deb. I'm real sorry—"

And then, as Deborah entered the room, she said, holding out the letter, "Here's a letter from Mr. Deering; he's been called home."

"Home!" said Deb, turning abruptly.

"Yes; he was called back suddenly. Too bad, isn't it?"

Not a word said Deborah, but, taking the letter, she turned and left the room.

"I am afraid she is a good deal disappointed," said Mrs. Avery, folding her napkin.

Deb stalked up the stairs, her head held straight and stiff.

"He did it on purpose — I know he did! He didn't want I should have a chance to go back with him—that's all there is to it!"

Bolting into the little sitting-room, Deb swung the door to after her with a bang, and, crossing to the window, stood looking out, her face a perfect sea of frowns, while her lips trembled with disappointment.

"It's just a trick to come it over me. Called home, indeed!" And she pressed the soft rug hard with her slender foot. "I won't read his old letter! I won't know a single word there is in it! I won't look at it!" And crushing the thin sheet like an egg-shell, she turned and tossed it into the grate.

"My! what's all that mad for?"

Deborah had supposed herself alone, but turning sharply, she saw Genevieve in the doorway leading to her room.

"I wish I could once be where you weren't!" said Deb hotly, bouncing from the room.

Turning to go downstairs, she heard Maybelle coming up, and so fled in the opposite direction. At the rear the hall made a sudden turn, and out of a little jog there ascended another flight of stairs leading to the servants' rooms. The family seldom came here, so Deb was not afraid of being pursued. Leaning against the wall, she wiped her heated face with her handkerchief. Noticing the sun pouring unobstructed by shade or curtain through the deep-silled window half-way up to the ceiling, she lightly stepped upon a covered laundry-basket Nora had taken so far toward the wash-room, and, grasping the sill with her wiry fingers, drew herself up into the deep cleft.

A fine view was gained, now that she was up where probably not one of the family had been before her. But she had not gone there seeking views, but rather to nurse the wrath within her. To be sure, save for the few words she had spoken to Dorman himself, she had not said she would go back, now that one straight from home was among them. But then again, she had not said even to herself that she would not—had, in fact, rather courted thoughts about taking sudden flight. She had more than once, since Dorman's visit, pictured to herself the commotion such a decision would create in the little family—and Deborah rather enjoyed sensations. More than onee she had been tempted to tease Maybelle by hinting at it, and to astonish Genie by declaring her intention of doing so if she chose. And now, here she was with the power of choice taken from her—the whole thing decided for her without so much as "by your leave."

Deb straightened out her feet along the wide sill, planting them with toes up firmly against the further casing, and sat looking gloomily down upon them. "I wouldn't have thought Dorm would try to come it over me so," she said. And then, hearing Maybelle call and go down stairs in search of her, Deb looked around in a sort of triumph at her secure hiding-place. Tearing off the ribbon from the braid into which her hair was now daily woven —much to her dislike—she unthreaded the kinky mass, shook every hair free, wound the ribbon around the top button of her jacket, and leaned back evidently more at ease. It was Saturday morning, and she was at liberty to do as she pleased. There she sat looking at the toes sticking straight up in front of her, with the morning sun streaming over them.

"I wouldn't have thought Dorm would do such a thing, and I so far off—no, I wouldn't have thought it!" Then, as she remembered how he was even at that moment back among the mountains—the dear, dear mountains!—tears came welling to the surface and ran silently down her cheeks. "He wouldn't have liked it done to Dan. He might have come and seen about it, after my telling him maybe I would go. But he's mad because I don't try harder to like it here—that's just all there is to it!—and he isn't going to have anything more to do with me;" and here she dropped her head upon her knees and cried in earnest.

It was very unusual for Deborah to give way to tears, and now that she had taken so much pains to crawl away by herself, it was unfortunate that at that very moment a slight form should dodge round the corner, and a pair of blue eyes look curiously in upon her. But the eyes were Maybelle's eyes, and Maybelle was good and true. So now she stood for a moment gazing in astonishment at the strange sight, and then stole quietly away as though a trust had been given into her keeping. No one was the wiser for what she had seen.

At last anger again clamored for right of way in Deb, and she raised her flushed face, and, plucking at the ribbon on the button of her jacket, said: "I just wish he had it all to go through! I wish he had Paul Greyson jabbing him one minute, and Genie the next, and the sneery schoolgirls the next, and the nonsensical rules the next, and all the time the feeling that he wasn't like any of the rest of 'em, and that he couldn't be if he tried a hundred years, and that he wouldn't be if he could—I'd like to see how he'd put up with it all, and ride right along over everything. He didn't ride over Bill Ewyn so very fast—not much he didn't!" And then, for want of something better to do, Deb braided up her hair, and tied the ribbon on in a good hard knot, as though it must not expect to be

untied ever again. This done, she straightened her limbs out in front of her, and leaning her head back, folded her arms. "I wouldn't have thought anything could be as hard for me as it is here—I wouldn't! I don't seem anybody here, and I was so much at home."

For a long time Deborah sat there in the high, deep window, with the sun lying in a glowing sheet over her. Nora had hurried away with the laundry basket, and she had not noticed Deb, nor Deb her. At last, when the discouraged girl swung her feet around and let them drop over the sill with an idea of going back to the everyday world again, every trace of the tears indulged in had disappeared, the tide of anger had ebbed, and as she leaped lightly to the floor, she even lost sight of the fact that she had had a basket for a stepping-stone.

It proved a dreary Saturday to Deborah. She dragged through her practicing, and when Mrs. Avery proposed a shopping expedition for some things needed by the girls, she assented, but she put no heart into anything she did that day.

Mrs. Avery felt sorry for the girl's evident disappointment; but a good deal like her daughter Maybelle was Mrs. Avery, and now she made no mention of what her eyes noted, but was only more kind and gentle—even loving—to the lonely stranger. The Sabbath here in her new environment was proving a little tedious to Deb. The service at the city church she was quite inclined to stamp with her usual seal—"show and sham"—save perhaps the music. The music claimed an awed attention from her, and especially upon the Sabbath that followed Dorman's desertion did it soothe and calm her.

"Mamma," said Maybelle, snuggling down by her mother's side in the confidential way sometimes indulged in on Sunday evenings when Benny was not around to claim his rights, "I don't think Deb likes always being with Genie and me. I think she likes to get off by herself sometimes and not have a soul near her."

"You think she would enjoy having a room entirely by herself, do you? I thought if I put her with you girls she would be less likely to get lonely."

"I don't think we help her not to feel that way; and she seems somehow to be bothered by us, though she does not say so—Deb wouldn't. But sometimes you know Genie is—well, you know, Genie is sometimes rather teasy to her."

"I wish Genevieve was kinder to Deb," said the mother thoughtfully.

"You mustn't think Deb ever said anything, mamma. Only, once—well, once I saw her off by herself, as though she had got as far as she could from us—" And then Maybelle stopped as though in fear of betraying the trust which had fallen to her keeping. Loyal Maybelle! Not even to mother could she bring herself to speak of that which she felt assured Deb would rather have kept a secret.

"I am afraid you are right, dear. I have had something of the same idea myself. Deb's father pays enough so that she ought not to feel cramped—not by any means. But there's no room just right for her except—" Mrs. Avery stopped and stroked her little daughter's head. Maybelle seemed to understand the break, and to be able to fill it in without words.

"Of course, mamma, you wouldn't want Deb to have that room; but there's the south one."

"That is so far away, I am afraid she would think we had put her apart from us all. She might use the guest-room, now Miss Blossom's gone."

"She wouldn't like being made company of, mamma, I'm sure," said Maybelle, with a decided little nod.

"Call it 'show and sham,' would she?" said Mrs. Avery, with a soft laugh, in which Maybelle joined.

"Isn't she funny, anyway, mamma?"

"Yes; but deary, if Deb can be kept from growing discouraged at the very start—can be helped to take hold of things in more of a right way—there's no telling what she might not do. I am surprised how pretty she sometimes looks in her new things."

"I think she begins to like me a little," said Maybelle.

"I hope so. There, darling, run away now;" and with a tender kiss on the part of one, and a clinging of arms on the part of the other, the little conference broke up, and only the glowing coals knew of the meeting of the two lovers there in the gloaming.

CHAPTER XIX.

DEB'S SECRET.

"I DON'T see where Deb has been," said Maybelle, coming one day into her mother's room just before luncheon. "She's been off with her sled somewhere ever since breakfast, and she looks as though she'd been having an awfully good time. But Genie says she wasn't at the coast."

"Well, if she has had a good time with that sled at last, I am glad," said Mrs. Avery. "I feared it was going to prove a useless investment." And then, as she rose and laid her hand upon the door, she turned to add: "I wouldn't tease Deb about where she has been; you know we agreed to give her all the freedom we could, and if she does not say anything, it is probably because she would rather not have us know just where she was."

Mrs. Avery thought little of Deb's absence that Saturday morning. But when it happened again that, having been out after the close of school for a longer time than usual, Deborah came in with bright eyes and glowing cheeks, the lady did wonder whence came an enjoyment so unusual. And when on Satur-

day morning she heard Deb refuse to go to the hill with the girls, and then, as soon as their backs were turned, saw her catch up her red cap and mittens and start off with her sled, her wonderings took a very decided form.

Having on her wraps for a trip down town, when she heard the dining-room door slam after Deb, Mrs. Avery thought, "I will at least see what direction the girl takes." Opening the door and glancing out, she saw that Deborah was already hurrying along the street, so she passed quickly down the steps and hastened her walk, that she might keep the red cap in sight. Her astonishment was great when, just after entering Clermont street, she saw Deborah hasten up a couple of stone steps, and, laying her hand upon the door, push it open, apparently without so much as the formality of a knock.

"Why, that is the old Downing Place! What can the girl be doing there?"

Mrs. Avery walked on, and as she reached the stone steps a flash of red passed by the window.

"She's there, that is sure! I wonder if she is pushing forward and making herself troublesome!" And the fair face of the lady flushed with annoyance.

Mrs. Avery passed slowly and thoughtfully on down the street, accomplished the errands that had brought her out, and returned by the way of Clermont street. But her feet refused to take her past the door beyond which she had seen Deborah disappear. "It can't be right for me to let it go on and not know just what she is about, so long as I am responsible for her," she murmured, and laid her gloved hand on the handle of the bell, which sent forth a silvery summons.

Mr. Downing, as was quite usual of a Saturday morning, himself opened the door.

"Mrs. Avery," said the lady, bowing and passing in. And then she well-nigh betrayed her surprise as the home-beauty fell around her. "I hope I am not intruding?" she said, dropping into the chair placed for her, "but was there not a little girl with a red sled here a short time ago?"

"Oh, yes—Deb! She's out in the back yard sliding. I'll call her."

"Oh, never mind about that," said Mrs. Avery, then flushed as she saw a look of surprise creep into the gentleman's face, as though he wondered why she had called if it were not for the girl.

"The truth is, I only wanted to know that Deborah was not proving a trouble to anyone."

"Deb a trouble! Not in the least," said Mr. Thaddeus, throwing himself into an easy-chair and looking every inch the gentleman, though his best coat was hanging in the closet at his caller's elbow. "It was our doing getting her here in the first place, you know."

"No, I do not know," said the lady, laughing. "It has been quite a wonder to us where she vanishes with that sled of hers."

Somehow Mrs. Avery felt she had always known this genial gentleman sitting near her. The usual formalities seemed hardly in keeping here, and she loosened the collar of her cloak, to be more at her ease.

"We took quite a fancy to the girl from the very first, seeing her go by to school," said Mr. Downing. "We can't help seeing a good deal of what goes on on this busy street, Mrs. Avery. And then, there are not many girls who walk as she walks—with her head just right, and not a swing nor a hitch anywhere. An especially fine walk for one so young."

Mrs. Avery smiled a pleasant assent—not so much pleased with the praise of Deborah's walk, perhaps, as that someone else had noticed the same thing she had noticed.

"The day she went down hill!" Mr. Downing continued. "We did not know who it was till she picked herself up."

"Then you saw that?" said Mrs. Avery, laughing.

"We couldn't help it, with our view here." And Mr. Downing turned toward the long windows, from which even then the throng of gay coasters could be seen. "But it was almost more than we could stand to see the other girls attack her so. Why, if you'll believe it, Mrs. Avery," he added in his boyishly frank way, "the girls were the worst of any of them!"

"But you can't so much blame them," said his visitor, with a laugh.

"Nonsense! It was sheer envy at her beating them all," said Mr. Downing, taking up the poker and raking the fire—Mrs. Downing was always affirming that she never could keep the grate tidy, with Ted there to poke the coals. "A clear case of feminine envy, madam; nothing else in the world."

"You surely take Deborah's part very warmly," said Mrs. Avery. "But I am afraid you are a little too severe upon the others."

"You would not say so if you had been here. But that is how my wife came to give her the privilege of using the back yard for coasting."

At this moment, from the side hall where opened the stairway, Mrs. Downing entered, unaware that her husband had a caller. She half stopped at sight of Mrs. Avery, blushed, and then came further into the room, a bird-cage in one hand, a pot of tuberoses in the other. If Mr. Downing felt a little pride in saying, "My wife, Mrs. Downing, Mrs. Avery," it was not to be wondered at.

"Mrs. Avery has called to see if Deborah is making us any trouble, Bertha."

"Not in the least," said Mrs. Downing, releasing her hands and turning to greet their guest. And then at mention of Deb she let the smile with which she had entered the room have full sway. "I was just watching them go over a bump they have made out of chunks of wood and snow. Deb never flinched when it came her turn, but went as straight as an arrow."

"Head first?" said Mrs. Avery slyly.

"Oh, no!" said Mrs. Downing, looking

shocked. "Deborah is very proper nowadays."

"Nothing like one's own experience," said Mrs. Avery, laughing.

"Well, Deb is certainly having a very good time now," said Mrs. Downing; and then, turning to Mrs. Avery, as though an idea had just come to her, "Wouldn't you like to see Deb go down?"

"I hardly think it would be best," said the caller; "she might feel as though she were being watched.

"Oh, she'll never be the wiser. We have a splendid view upstairs. And it's the last thing she has time for—to look at the windows. Come!"

Mrs. Avery found the little lady's way as irresistible as that of her husband, and she gathered up her cloak and prepared to follow Bertha, feeling well-nigh as young as the girl at her side. She found the stairs rather straight and dumpy, but the softest of carpets covered them, and when she stepped over the sill into the cosy comfort upon which the coal stove was beaming so benignly, an exclamation of delight escaped her at the prettiness of the room.

"Yes," said Mrs. Downing, with a happy flush, and a glance around at the combination of soft grays, browns and gold, "Mr. Downing likes pretty things." Opening the damper of the stove as she passed, she gathered up the drapery of the one large window filling nearly two-thirds of that side of the room, and held it back so her guest could look out.

"What a wonderful view you have here! I had forgotten about a sweep the river takes," Mrs. Avery exclaimed, her eye kindling with pleasure as it fell upon the high banks of the river, which just here made a bend.

"It is a surprise to almost everyone—the view here," said the other. "The house opening from the street as it does, is misleading."

"And there's Deb," said Mrs. Avery, glancing down. "How happy she does look! But who is that boy with her?"

"Only Jimmy Stiles; his mother lives in that little brown house there on the bank. She cannot very well spare Jimmy to go to the coast, so we let him use the yard. He is the very best boy you ever knew—so kind-hearted, and good to his mother and the children. Deb will not learn anything bad from him, I can assure you, if he does wear a shabby coat."

"Dear me! Did you see that?" exclaimed Mrs. Avery, as Jimmy on his unpainted sled went over the "bump" the children had planted two-thirds of the way down the track, landing near the foot and gliding on to the ice of the river. "If there isn't Deb going to try the same experiment! She'll break her neck!" And then, as she heard Mr. Downing coming up, she turned to him hastily. "Oh, do go down and tell that girl to stop! She has no idea of danger!"

Mrs. Downing laughed merrily. "She went over it when I was up here before, and she did not do it as though it was the first time—not by any means."

"But—"

Mrs. Avery held her breath as she saw Deb push from the brow of the hill and go speeding on her way, but an ejaculation ending in an excited little handclap of triumph escaped her as Deb, striking the bump, rose, and then with a gentle undulation of her lithe form, struck again the hard track and glided on to the ice beyond, exceeding by several yards the boy's run.

"Did I ever in my life!" Mrs. Avery said, as Deb, shouting and hallooing victoriously, waved Jimmy a challenge to do better. "I can't wonder that she thinks most things here cramped and narrow, with too much 'show and sham' about them," she added, as though to herself. "How happy she does look!"

"It's been just so every day she has been here," said Mrs. Downing. "Jimmy thinks there never was another such girl, his mother tells me."

"I guess Jimmy is right," said Mrs. Avery, turning to Mr. Downing, and then dropping into the pretty rocker his wife drew forward for her.

"And now, Mrs. Avery," said Mr. Downing, taking the mate to the chair Mrs. Avery occupied, "will you please do us the favor of telling who Deborah Gibbs is, and where you got her?"

Up to this time the Downings had known nothing concerning the strange girl to whom they had given so much happiness, beyond what they had learned upon the first day of her coming—that her name was "Deb" Gibbs. At her other visits she had dodged through the room, used the last bit of time she had to spare, and then had dodged out again.

So there in the quiet of that secluded room, with the fire burning brightly, and the faint perfume from a half-opened rose stealing over her, Mrs. Avery told these new-found friends of Deb's as much as she herself knew concerning her; told them of the little ranch up among the Colorado mountains, with the matchless atmosphere hanging over it, and rugged peaks shutting it in; told them of the quiet couple whose whole life thus far had gone, it would seem, for Deb, whose future was centered in Deb, whose whole horizon, in fact, was bounded by Deb; then she told them of the girl's sudden wish to throw aside her wild, aimless way of letting the days drift by, and to start out in making something more of herself than she could there at home; and of the discouragements that she had of necessity met at every turn. Finally she told them of Deb's climb to the mountain-top. And as Mrs. Avery told the story, it was well worth listening to, and her hearers sat as though spellbound.

"I told you, wife, she never got that walk on our pavements. Bless her!" said Mr. Downing. "I hope city life won't spoil her."

"How glad we are to know of it!" said Mrs. Downing. "One cannot do much for a girl

like that. If she could get to the top of that mountain the way you say she did, she ought to be able to overcome the difficulties presented to her now." And then, as the three made their way down the narrow stairs to the outer door, the young wife said, with sweet insistence, "You must let us help you, Mrs. Avery. It will be so lovely if Deborah does come out ahead of everything."

When, just before noon, Deborah returned home and Mrs. Avery, looking up from her sewing, said, "Had a good time, Deb?" Maybelle detected a ring in her mother's voice and a twinkle in her eyes that made her feel sure she had found out Deb's secret, and the moment the latter passed from the room, she asked:

"Now where has Deb been, mamma?"

"How should I know?" said the mother, trying to look innocent.

"But I feel sure you do know," said Maybelle, crossing to her mother's side and twining her arms about her neck.

"What do you care, Maybelle, so long as Deb doesn't bother us?" said Genevieve, from her place by the window.

"But I don't think it is nice for mamma and Deb to have secrets from us."

"But if it is a secret of Deb's, you may be sure," said Mrs. Avery, laughing, "that I shall not betray it." And then, as Maybelle followed her from the room, she added more seriously, "Don't you go to teasing Deb about it, or don't follow her to see where she goes."

"As though I'd spy on anyone!" said Maybelle.

Had the hall been lighter, Mrs. Avery might have been seen to flush slightly at this; but as she passed to the dining-room, she comforted herself with the reflection, "It is my duty to keep in knowledge of Deborah, as long as she is entrusted to our care."

CHAPTER XX.

PAUL GETS WHAT HE DESERVES.

PAUL GREYSON was a great trial to Deborah. From the very first she had taken a dislike to the effeminate boy whose fingers restlessly reached for other pies besides his own, and who was always troubling himself with things which in no wise concerned him. Not alone for his treatment of herself did she so thoroughly dislike him, but more for his worthless character. There was a loyalty to truth and uprightness about this girl of the mountains that shrank from deception of any kind, and Paul was full of deceit. There was a sterling integrity in Deborah that, though partaking in some measure of the roughness of the mountains among which she had lived, partook as well of their solidity, and in one sense of their grandeur. As soon would she have cut off her own right hand as to have told an out-and-out falsehood; while sooner would she have suffered torture than gain an end by climbing a ladder of subterfuge. While this made her many times seem brusque and too outspoken, it also awakened in those who knew her well, a respect which placed her higher in their estimation than Deborah in her sensitive diffidence dreamed.

Each day the bond between Deb and Mrs. Avery was strengthening. There could never be those rare confidences between the two that existed between Maybelle and her mother. As well might the hidden treasure of the chestnut burr be expected to drop as easily as a ripe peach mellowing in the orchard, as that a nature like Deborah Gibbs' would respond as readily to loving confidences as did Maybelle Avery. But in its own way each was sweet and good and worth the saving; so thought Mrs. Avery.

Genevieve was daily growing away from Maybelle, shooting up tall, and straight, and beautiful—one kind of beauty; every day becoming more fond of praise, more anxious for admiration, and more solicitous to rank high in all that she undertook. Her ambition was leading her where Maybelle, fragile and affectionate, had not the slightest wish to follow. To go with girls older than herself was Genevieve's delight; to be the best dressed, the best looking, and the best student in all her little world, was her constant aim; and little thought had she for anyone save Genevieve Avery. So the two sisters were taking separate ways, yet hardly conscious that they were separate.

Deb was of course backward in all that pertained to school life. Concentration and application were new to her. However, it was not here she found the most trouble, but in the rules and daily customs and courtesies hedging in her present life with a wall of bristling spikes, into which she could no more avoid running than she could have stopped breathing.

As we have said, Paul Greyson was a great annoyance to Deborah. It seemed as though he could never let pass an opportunity to torment her, or miss a chance of teasing her. Often the girl's fingers tingled to lay hold of him and give him the shaking he so richly deserved; for that she could beat him in an out-and-out encounter she never once doubted. Paul was sly, and his very slyness exasperated Deb. Had he made use of open methods for his attacks, she would have minded them far less.

It was nearly dusk one evening when, entering a little park which afforded a short cut home, Deb found that Paul was behind her.

"Ho! ho! You thought nobody saw your meeting there on the corner! Pretty how-do-you-do I should call that!" he said sneeringly.

Straight on walked Deb, without so much as turning her head, but she flung back the words, "If you haven't any better business than that, you'd better buy a wood-saw."

"Maybe your friend would lend me one," said Paul.

Deb quickened her step, but Paul quickened his as well, so as to keep within firing distance.

"I say, Deb, what do you think Uncle

Avery would say if he knew you were meeting fellows on the corners? A nice, proper girl you are!"

On kept the girl, straight and stiff.

"Better invite him to the house; Genevieve would be so glad to know him!"

Deb half turned. "Paul Greyson, I sha'n't stand much more!" and her eyes flashed there in the gloaming.

"How'll you help yourself?" said Paul, dancing on in front of her, and then, turning to face her, walking backward. "Maybe you'd like to call your friend in to fight me; but I'd have you know I don't fight with low fellows who give girls letters on the corners of the streets."

With one bound Deb was beside him, and with a tiger-like grip fastened upon his collar, she said, her teeth so tightly pressed together that she could hardly get the words from between them:

"Take that back, will you, or I'll shake the breath out of you!" and back with a jerk went Paul's head, while his cap rolled off, and his teeth chattered as with an ague-fit, as a quick succession of shakes followed.

"I say, Deb—"

"Don't you 'Deb' me!" cried the angry girl, while her wiry arm, strong and supple from crag-climbing, moved back and forth vigorously. "I'll see whether I'm to be watched and have my life hectored out of me, you sneaking spy!"

Yank, yank, went Paul's head, and click, click, went his teeth. At last he blurted out, as Deborah paused to take breath:

"Deb Gibs, if you don't let go my collar, you'll be sorry for it!" and he wriggled to get free.

But more than a match for the slender boy was this girl bred among the mountains, especially when her blood was at boiling point, as now.

"A low, mean fellow, was he?" she said, with her face brought close to her antagonist's. "A low, mean fellow, just because his coat is not as black as yours! That's the way you judge folks, is it? That's the way you form your opinions!" and she ground her teeth in disgust.

"I saw him give you a letter, anyhow," said Paul doggedly. "You know he did, and it's in your jacket pocket now. I can see it."

"And is that any concern of yours?" retorted Deb.

"I'll tell Aunt Avery; see if I don't!"

"I've no doubt of it. It's just like your meddling ways—spying on others and making all the trouble you can;" and with one more impatient shake, she loosened her hold and sent Paul as far as his knees upon the ground.

Paul rose and picked up his cap. "I'd knock you down if you weren't a girl," he muttered angrily. "You'll find out a thing or two when my mother hears of this."

Deb laughed. "Yes, I would go and tell my mother I pitched on a girl, and got beaten for my pains!" she said, feeling to see that the contents of her jacket pocket were safe, and then walking swiftly away.

The scene had been without a witness. But had there been a dozen, it would probably have been all the same to Deborah Gibbs, who, as she walked along, drew a breath of relief, as though something she had long expected to be called upon to do was accomplished.

The days were getting longer now, and Deb had stayed out so late that dinner was announced as she went up the front stairs. Tearing off her jacket and hat, and removing the contents of her jacket pocket to that of her dress, she stood a moment before the mirror. Then she went down, muttering, as though only half satisfied with what she had done: "I wish I had given it to him harder when I had a chance."

Deb Gibbs was one who could come fresh from an encounter and betray nothing to those around her. Now she ate her dinner as composedly as though she had not just been shaking half out of his senses the nephew of the gentleman seated at the head of the luxuriously appointed table.

It was about half-past seven that same evening, and the girls had just settled to their books, when the bell rang, and a half-hour later Deborah received a summons to the library. She had a premonition of why she was sent for, but the Avery girls had not, and they looked up in surprise as, with a defiant slamming of her book, Deb walked away. With head carried high, and features set and grim, she walked into the library. As she had expected, Mrs. Greyson was with Mr. and Mrs. Avery.

"Come here, Deborah," said Mr. Avery, not unkindly, but perhaps a trifle more decidedly than was his wont, motioning at the same time for Deb to be seated in the chair he pushed forward.

Deb crossed to where the chair stood, but instead of taking it, set it back against the wall hard, and stood beside it straight as an Indian, her eyes fixed upon the carpet.

"Mrs. Greyson gives rather a sorry account of the way you have been dealing with Paul, Deborah," began Mr. Avery, gravely.

"Paul came at me and tried to plague the life out of me, and I gave him a good shaking, and it was what he deserved, and I'll do it again if he don't behave himself!" poured out Deb without a stop or a break anywhere.

"I don't see, brother Jansen—with my nerves—" began Mrs. Greyson, half-rising and drawing her wrap around her.

"Hold on, Mary! Don't be in a hurry! See here, Deb! You must remember that some people have not the strong nerves we have."

"But they needn't set on me!" said Deb defiantly. "I sha'n't stand it!" her nostrils dilating, and her breath coming fast.

"Come, Deborah, take this chair!" said Mr. Avery, drawing forward another chair.

"I won't sit and be jabbed at by folks that think I'm no better than a Hottentot!" replied the girl, her face flaming.

"Did I ever!" said Mrs. Greyson, raising her hands.

"Deborah," said Mrs. Avery quietly, "while you are with us you must do as Mr. Avery and I wish; and it is our wish that you be seated and talk this matter over calmly."

Deb threw herself into a chair, but not the one Mr. Avery placed for her.

"Now, Deb," said Mr. Avery, leaning back, "will you please tell me how it was you came to give Paul a shaking on the public street?"

"Because it was what he deserved, and because it was on the public street he came at me," said Deb, pulling off her hair ribbon and setting her imprisoned locks free; "I wish I never had set foot on this part of the earth!" and she rose and stood upon her feet panting.

"Did I ever!" again came from Mrs. Greyson, with a deprecatory raising of her hands.

"Sit down, Deb. You don't want to get excited," said Mr. Avery, looking slightly amused. "Now what did Paul do that made you so angry?"

"He watched me like a spy, and said I met low fellows who gave me letters on the corners," said Deb, dropping into the chair.

"And did you meet anyone who gave you a letter?" said Mr. Avery, as quietly as he could.

"Yes, I did."

"Deb, if you would please say simply 'yes,' or 'yes, sir,' I should like the sound of it much better," said Mr. Avery. (Deb gave a toss of her head.) "And now about this friend of yours—is he such a boy as Mrs. Avery would approve, do you think?"

"He's the only decent boy I've seen since I came," said Deb, her eyes flashing. "If Paul had his pluck he wouldn't have got a shaking—from a girl too."

Again Mrs. Greyson's hands went up, and she exclaimed, "Dear brother Jansen!"

"Wait, Mary! Deb," he continued in a fatherly tone, "when you have been with us a little longer, I hope you will learn that it is not just what we expect, for you to speak slightingly of relatives of ours."

"Then let 'em behave themselves," muttered the girl.

"But, Deb," broke in Mrs. Avery, "you must tell us where you met this boy and got acquainted with him. We cannot have you making street acquaintances, you know."

Deb's face dropped into a sullen, dogged expression, and she said nothing as she smoothed her hair ribbon into a compact roll and spatted it defiantly with the palm of her hand.

"Did I ever!"

"Hush, Mary! Deb, do you not think it fair that we should know where you are and whom you are with, while you make your home with us?" said Mr. Avery, looking kindly at his ward. "I expect an answer."

For a moment more Deborah sat without stirring, and then she sprang to her feet.

"I might have known how it would be! I might have known it would end this way, and that there was no taking any comfort anywhere! I might have known I'd be watched and tripped up. You could as soon get water to run up hill, as to get a bit of free breath here. But I won't stand it! I won't be jeered at when I'm with 'em, and watched and spied on when I'm not. I'll go back home. My father'd never forgive you if he knew the dog-life they were leading me."

"Husband, I cannot believe we are taking the best way to get at this," said Mrs. Avery, rising with heightened color, and crossing to where Deborah stood; "if Deb has done anything wrong—"

"I haven't done anything wrong! There wasn't a wrong thing about it!"

"Don't, Deb!" said Mrs. Avery, laying her hand on the girl's shoulder. "If there's anything she's been led into—"

"I wasn't led into anything—"

"But, Kate," remonstrated Mr. Avery, "we are in it now, and it hardly seems best to hush the matter up."

"I'd have you know there isn't a thing to hush up!" said Deb, stamping the carpet with her slender foot; "there isn't a thing to it—it's all Paul's trumping-up!"

"Did I—"

"But there was a boy," said Mr. Avery, half-laughing; "you said so yourself."

"Yes, and the only decent boy I've seen since I came, too, and he and I've had more fun sliding—"

"Is that the boy?" said Mrs. Avery, light breaking over her face.

"What do you know about it?' said Deb in her blunt fashion, a little surprise showing through the anger.

"I've known for some time that Mrs. Downing was allowing you and Jimmy to use their back-yard for coasting," said Mrs. Avery demurely; "she told me herself that you could not find a better playfellow."

"Huh!" said Deb, evidently not relishing the fact that what she had supposed a secret had been known all along.

"You see, husband, when the children did not make it very pleasant for Deborah on the coast, Mrs. Downing let her take her sled there. Their yard slopes down beautifully to the river, and Mrs. Downing said no one but Jimmy used the hill, and that he was one of the very best of boys." All of which Mr. Avery knew was said for Mrs. Greyson's benefit rather than for his own, as it had been told him weeks before by his wife upon her first finding out where Deb betook herself. But now he only said:

"Of course, Kate, if you knew about her playing with the boy, that makes some difference; but still, it does not just necessitate his writing letters to her, does it?" And he glanced toward his wife as though not willing to be convinced too easily, especially before his sister, who was plainly unconvinced.

"He didn't write me any letters! He wrote a letter to Dan, that I was going to put in with one of mine to surprise him with, 'cause he knew Dan before he went to the mountains,

when they lived in Cincinnati, and Dan didn't know as Jimmie was here, and that's all there is to it; and if you don't believe it, you can take the old letter and see for yourself." And drawing the well-guarded treasure from her pocket, Deborah threw it down at Mr. Avery's feet.

Mr. Avery picked it up and looked relieved as he read:

DAN DEERING
WEST OAK
COL

Care Miss Deb Gibbs,

written in a cramped boyish hand.

"Well, I do believe, Deborah, we've been barking up the wrong tree this time. But then, there's the shaking—"

"Now, brother Jansen, I can't stay to hear Paulie—"

"But, Mary, I was about coming to that part."

"It's just as Paulie says—you and sister Kate uphold that girl."

"But you must see—"

"I see that whatever is brought here'll be smoothed over and made to look all right."

"But, Mary," said Mrs. Avery, "you must see we began by blaming Deborah unjustly."

"I see that a strange, outlandish girl will be believed before your own sister's child," said Mrs. Greyson, laying her hand upon the door. "And let me tell you, brother Jansen, you will live to rue the day you gave such a free hand to those you know nothing whatever about."

"I hope not," said Mr. Avery good-naturedly. He had been used from boyhood to this sister of his. "I trust that when Deborah gets some of her little prickly ways rubbed off, she's going to be quite an honor to us."

"Honor indeed!" exclaimed his sister. "Remember, I wash my hands of whatever comes of it!"

"We will, Mary." And with a serene face Mr. Avery followed his sister to the door and closed it. Then turning back to the library, he said, throwing himself into an easy-chair by the grate and drawing up another for Deborah between that and the one his wife occupied:

"Now, Deb, we'll have to talk this matter over a little more, I think."

"I don't mind, now she's gone," said Deb humbly, sitting down and proceeding to rebraid her hair. "I'll never forget the way you stood by me—never as long as I live. And I will try not to disappoint you, and to do what you and she want me to;" with a nod toward Mrs. Avery.

"Exactly," said Mr. Avery. "That's about how I thought you'd feel when you came to study the case. You know you are always to depend on our standing by you in whatever is fair and aboveboard, and we expect the same of you."

Deborah looked up a little questioningly.

"You see, it wasn't just standing by us to treat our relatives so."

"But Paul—"

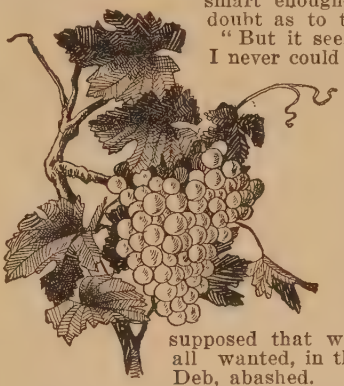
"We will say nothing about Paul. There's that sister of mine—it wasn't quite the thing to be so peppery, you know."

"But she does pinprick so!" said Deb, moving a little nearer to Mrs. Avery, who was now assisting with the braid.

"Yes! But, Deb, if we can get a way of living above being tormented by the little things, it's wonderfully comfortable. Now there is Paul, who will probably be something of a thorn to you as long as you are with us, and if you are going to take notice of it all, and what his mother says too, you'll have your hands pretty full, I fear."

"That's what Dorm says," said Deb. Mr. and Mrs. Avery exchanged glances. "But it's easy enough to preach. Dorm wasn't so brave when he was ground down by being in debt to Bill Ewyn."

"Well, I don't know anything about that," Mr. Avery said, "but I can tell you there are not many men who command the respect that Mr. Deering does; and if you can rise above the difficulties in your path in anything like the brave way he has done, you'll have reason to congratulate yourself. And you can do it, Deb, if only you have a mind. You are smart enough—there is no doubt as to that."



"But it seems as though I never could get to be like other folks."

"And who wants you to be?" said Mrs. Avery, in her clear, helpful voice, as though this idea was a very queer one to entertain.

"Why, I supposed that was what you all wanted, in the end," said Deb, abashed.

"Not by any means. We want you to be Deb, but we want you to make Deb the very best sort of Deb that could be made." And Mrs. Avery took the tray of fruit for which she had rung.

"Of course, that is it," said Mr. Avery; "we don't want people all alike—not by any means. Now, here are these," he said, taking up a cluster of white grapes. "How silly it would be for grapes to think they ought to grow like pears, and so stray off to get something that would make them different from what they were intended to be, instead of putting all their strength into making the very best, sweetest, most luscious grapes the world ever thought of. Don't you see?" Deb laughed. "Now, what you want to do, as Mrs. Avery says, is to see just how you can turn to the best account what's been put in

you. If you can make use of all that, you'll have enough to do."

Deborah's face clouded again. "But there doesn't seem anything for me but just fight—fight for every inch gained. It's hardly worth bothering with."

Mr. Avery leaned back and said quietly:

"Deborah, you must try to rid your mind of the idea that you are different from other people in having to meet hard things. Each has his obstacles to overcome, his mountain to climb, and each aims to reach the top. But there is a difference in the way people climb. Some go sighing about hardships encountered, with shoulders bowed and head drooping so low that the miasmas breathed make each step difficult. Others climb erect, with feet planted firmly, lungs filled with bracing air, a song in the heart, and eyes fixed upon the heights. The one grows weaker as he climbs, the other stronger. Which way will you climb?

"And another thing, Deborah: Don't blame circumstances for hardships that you call down upon yourself. That was a good piece of climbing you did the day you carelessly dropped out of the trail. You made your way by sheer force of will to the top, and you encountered hardships. But suppose you had not dropped out of the trail, had followed the path—that had been so carefully marked for travelers up the mountain—and the guide provided, how would it have been then?"

Deborah's eyes flashed appreciation of the speaker's meaning, and then her head drooped a little. It was evident she realized that Mr. Avery had shorn the adventure of some of its plumes.

Seeing he was understood, Mr. Avery leaned slightly forward and said gently:

"But as to the real hardships we are obliged to encounter, Deborah, in the good Book we find these words: 'To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.' That would rather seem as though the One who placed us here counted on our being overcomers, would it not?" And rising, he withdrew from the room.

CHAPTER XXI.

STARTING FOR THE TOP.

IT WAS as though a loom had been set to work in Deb's brain. Over the warp of renewed confidence in herself all day glanced the shuttles of thought. And so she could as well be Deb Gibbs and be somebody as to be someone else, provided Deb Gibbs made Deb Gibbs the right sort of a person—the sort that amounted to something. Was she likely to? Was there anything to her, anyway? And Deborah knocked the side of her head hard with her doubled-up fist, there at her desk in the schoolroom, to see whether there was anything to it or not. Ever since her advent into this new world she had been haunted with the idea that never was there a girl so different from all other human kind as she. "Where did you pick her up?" "Who ever saw such an oddity!" she had heard rung in all its different changes since her arrival; and the conviction that she could hope for little until she grew more like other folks had settled down into her heart with a weight of discouragement known only to herself, deadening the eagerness with which she had started forth. And now here were Mr. and Mrs. Avery knocking at that very shackle by saying there was no need for her to give a thought to how other people were made, but simply to attend to her own way of growing.

Deborah ought to have been studying her grammar lesson there in the low seat in the corner of the schoolroom, but instead she was tossing the little shuttles backward and forward over this warp the Averys had fastened to the loom of her busy brain. Yes, it would be silly for a grape to try to be a pear, as long as it was made a grape; but then, it would be awful to be just a sour frost-grape that set people's teeth on edge. Maybe, after all, she was only a wild frost-grape and could never struggle into anything sweet and luscious; but no, she wouldn't be a stunted thing like that. She would overcome this tendency to be a frost-grape—"to him that overcometh—will I give—a new name." Deborah bowed her head to hide the sparkle of tears that came with a strange tenderness of heart at remembrance of this promise to overcomers, pointed out by Mr. Avery, in the "good Book." No, she would not be a frost-grape.

And all the time the pointers of the round clock fastened upon the wall above the teacher's desk were creeping nearer the time for the grammar recitation. Deb made a dashing attempt to rectify matters, and rattled away to herself desperately. But it was too late; the grammar lesson was a failure. With her arithmetic she started out better; but there was that loom with its buzzing and humming. An hour later the arithmetic was also set down as a failure. And so it went through the entire list of Deb's school work for that day. At its close, Miss Wickfield and Miss Darrow, the teachers to whom Deborah recited, were completely discouraged, and Deborah herself was nonplussed.

She had started forth in the morning with a vague idea that at last she had reached a turning. She would give up feeling around to see how she could be like other people, and simply be Deb Gibbs. But then, there had been a sort of understanding with herself that Deb Gibbs amounted to something; and here was a list of failures, complete and absolute, for the first day's showing.

It was the day for Deborah's music lesson, unfortunately; and as the others left the seminary, she entered the music room and took her seat upon the music stool, with the little spectacled professor beside her, and began her lesson with a what's-the-use-of-trying sort of

air that boded little enjoyment, to say the least, for the one giving his eighth lesson that day.

"One, two, three, four; one, two, three, four; one, two, three, four—"

"Oh! oh! oh! Mees Geebs!" cried the little man, wrinkling his face into frowns. "One would think you had no ears with which to hear yourself! Do just see now what you haf got!"

Deborah had struck into a five-finger exercise—about the extent of her present field of action—and instead of taking the same pitch for both hands, had made a sorry mistake by hammering like mad with C and B for her two starting points.

"What a fuss for only a few notes!" she said, when she had learned the cause of the outcry.

The professor wrinkled his face again, as though swallowing something very unpalatable, but proceeded with the lesson. That is, proceeded as far as was possible with so very little help from his associate. As it had been with the earlier lessons of the day, the beginning was a fair sample of the whole, and the music lesson also was a failure. At its close Professor Belcher could not resist giving a little thrust in his own peculiar way, as he saw his pupil gathering up her books with an air of indifference.

"I feel greatly to fear, Mees Geebs, it is most unnecessary for us to try muzeek, unless you do more as the other young missees do."

"I don't expect ever to do as the other young missees do!" retorted Deb, with the same tone and accent the professor had used, walking with an Indian-like tread from the room.

"I wish other young missees had never been born!" she muttered as she stalked down the stairs. And later, as she walked on toward home, she told herself, "It's very well for the Averys to say it's just as well to be Deb Gibbs as to be anybody else; but I shall never know one moment's peace till I set about making myself over—that's all there is about that!" Here she passed the Downings', and Mrs. Downing, from her place in the long window, gave the girl a sunny nod.

"If everybody was like her, I wouldn't mind so much; but then, I don't suppose I ever could make myself into such a woman as she is."

Deborah went up the front steps feeling that after all it was the same hard, dull world, and that it was fine to hear the talk about grapes being as good as pears, but was another thing to make either worth having; and a sigh of discouragement escaped her as she fitted her latch key.

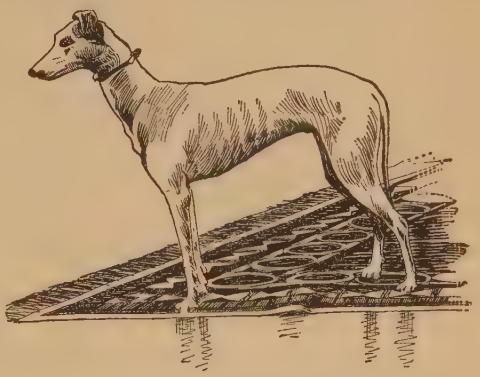
"Oh, Deb, I am so glad for you! I am so glad for you!" and Maybelle danced on the lower stair, for a moment impeding further progress, and then danced on in front of Deb up the flight. "You can't guess what it is. Something better than anything else in the world! I'm sure you'll think so; I should if it was mine."

"Maybelle, dear," said Mrs. Avery, turning from lighting the gas in the upper hall, "you said you wouldn't say anything about it until after dinner."

"But, mamma, you knew I couldn't keep it that long; you knew I couldn't. Why, I couldn't eat a bite of dinner, with that sticking there; and you'd want me to eat my dinner, mamma."

"I don't see what the fuss is all about," said Deborah.

"You will when you come in here;" and Maybelle, instead of opening the door to their own room, laid her hand upon one which, as it flew back, Deborah remembered she had never seen open before—in fact, had never noticed it at all; one between their room and Mrs. Avery's. But she now took in nothing of the room—save that it was luxuriously furnished—for her eyes were chained by what she saw upon the soft rug in front of a glowing grate. It was a beautiful greyhound that had evidently risen at the sound of the opening door, and now stood with large eyes turned questioningly toward the girls. Deb stood as



though struck dumb, while Maybelle quivered from head to foot with expectant delight.

"How under the sun did he get here?" at last Deb blurted out.

"Didn't I say you'd be surprised?" said Maybelle, clapping her hands.

"Whose is it?" said Deb, not comprehending.

Again Maybelle laughed and danced around the room. "How much would you give to know, Deb?" she said, her face all dimples and twinkles. "Mamma, Deb can't guess who he's for," she said, as her mother came and looked in over Deborah's shoulder.

Maybelle laid her hand on the head of the dog, trying to brush back the small pointed ears, which made the dog thrust his sharp muzzle up under her arm in a coaxing way. "Oh, doggie, how I would love you if you were mine!" she said, almost as though to herself.

"Now, dear, you are surely not going to envy

Deb her one possession from home, are you?"

"Oh, Mrs. Avery, is he mine?" cried Deborah, her face lighting; "is he one of the greyhounds from the mine?"

"So Mr. Deering writes. He hopes you'll take good care of him, as he has been a great favorite with them all there."

Deborah stood and looked down upon the dog, but did not lay a hand upon him, as Maybelle had done. Caresses came shyly even for a dog from Deb, and to the two looking on, her manner seemed cold, almost unappreciative. But they did not understand Deb, or know that her heart, even at that moment, was beating in a perfect ecstasy of surprised delight.

"Deborah," said Mrs. Avery softly, "we have thought best to let you use this room after this—have it for yours as long as you are with us."

"Mine!" said Deb, sweeping her eye around; "you're fooling."

Maybelle bubbled over again.

"Sober earnest," said Mrs. Avery, smiling and caressing Maybelle; "you are to do just as you please here, and no one is to come in unless you give permission."

"But you'll let me in, Deb?" said Maybelle coaxingly. And then she laughed outright at Deb's unreadable face; "I don't believe, mamma, Deb really thinks you mean what you say," she said, winding her arms around her mother's waist.

"She will when she sees what undisputed possession we give her here, leaving her to turn the key on the whole of us if she chooses." Then kissing Deb, who stood strangely silent still, Mrs. Avery moved away, with her little daughter's arms twined around her.

When Deb saw the door was closed, she turned and swept a curious, half-startled look around her, and then turned a slower, more scrutinizing one upon the things the room held. She had never seen such pictures—dark and rich, interspersed with glowing bits of landscape and flashing water—as looked down upon her from these walls; never seen such fairy furnishings—light stands, with rockers of the same pattern, couch, and cushions in profusion; had not known that such slender vases were made, such daintily carved shelves ever put together, as she now beheld, with here and there gray moss hanging festooned over a bright cluster of berries or a group of pink-lined seashells.

Deb hardly drew a breath, but when her eye fell upon that which filled the space between the two long windows, an exclamation escaped her. Under an oval glass lay a sleeping child beautifully carved in marble. Asleep upon its pillow it lay, one hand slipped underneath its cheek; the other, full of baby dimples, holding a torn doll. Above the glass hung the picture of a young girl in a black velvet jacket with a bit of narrow lace at the throat. Was it Maybelle? Yes—no! She might have known at first it was not, Deb thought the next moment. This one had Maybelle's hair—what golden hair it was!—fastened at the back with a comb. But Deborah could not take her gaze from the picture, it so held her with its look like Maybelle, and there stood the dog with his great eyes fixed upon her.

The dinner-bell sounded, and Deborah drew away from the spot as though it was something she could not yet comprehend.

Maybelle had had her instructions, and she left the subject of Deb's new possessions entirely alone during the dinner hour. Genevieve was dining with a friend, and whether Mr. Avery had also been instructed like Maybelle, or whether he was not aware of what a transition state Deborah was in at the time, he said little to her, and she slipped through the meal and from the table, thinking herself unnoticed.

With a wildly-beating heart she crept back to the charmed door and turned the knob. The dog had heard her step and stood waiting for her. She had a biscuit from the table hidden in her handkerchief. In an ecstasy of delight, she saw him devour it. Looking around, she noticed that the grate had been replenished and the gas lighted. Then she saw what she had not noticed before—an open writing-desk, upon which rested her school-books, while in the corner opposite was a piano. Gradually her eyes observed other things they had failed to see earlier—a case of books in bindings of green and gold and rich brown. At the back of the room hung heavy portieres. Going to them and sweeping them aside, Deborah found a bed draped in white. Scenting the faint perfume of flowers, she saw upon a dresser a vase filled with heliotrope. Had the flowers been placed there for her? Her heart was very tender as she turned and met the great eyes of the greyhound that had been slowly following her.

"Oh, dog!" she said, reaching down and giving the dog's head so close an embrace that a sharp bark was sent forth in protest, "you don't know how I feel—you don't, dog!" And down upon the rug with the dog she sank, and the tears ran over the dark cheeks, wetting them like rain. "You don't know how they've come it over me, dog!" she said, pulling out her handkerchief. Having used it vigorously, she dropped it to give the dog's head another squeeze that brought out one more short bark. "I can't help it—you'll have to stand it. I've just got to half choke you, I'm so glad. But you won't like it here!" she said, looking down into the eyes fixed upon her. "You'll think it close and cramped. There are no great rocks here; no great hill, with another hill at the top of that, and another at the top of that. No! it's just pancake-like here. But it is not so bad, dog, when you get used to it. This is a nice room—you can see that it's an awful nice room—fit for a queen." And Deborah looked around her. Then, seeming suddenly to bethink herself of something, she got up hastily, and running to the door, turned the key, and, seeing a little brass bolt above the keyhole, shot that into place also;

and then standing back, she shook her fist defiantly. "There, folks, I guess you'll have to stay out now. I guess you'll let Deb Gibbs alone for a while. And she'll do just what she's a mind to do, too—see if she doesn't!"

Dropping down, Deb began tearing off her shoes and stockings. Then rising, she loosened her hair from its confinement, and commenced circling around the room in a series of gipsy-like dives and gyrations: one moment upon the arm of the sofa, then leaping to a chair, and back to the sofa again; making no sound, and, light-footed and sure, making no mistakes, but poising up on her bare feet wheresoever she chose, without thought of danger or accident.

At last she stood panting and out of breath before the dog, which had at first begun taking his long limbs after her, but had soon desisted and stood following her with eyes only.

"What do you think Genie'd say to that, dog?" she said in a low, exultant tone that was threaded with laughter. "But she won't get a chance to know it, will she? No, sir-ee! She'll know now only what we have a mind to let her know." And turning, Deborah shook her fist again at the closed door.

"Wouldn't Paulie's mother like to say, 'Did you ever! My dear brother Jansen!' I declare, dog, it makes me want to do it some more." And Deb drew a breath so deep and long that it would have told Mrs. Avery more plainly than words how sorely she had felt her cramped life.

Throwing herself down upon a low seat by the dog, with her bare feet nestled in the depths of the rug, Deborah sat looking into the fire, while her face settled into a soft, thoughtful expression. After a while her eyes grew moist, and one or two tears stole out and sparkled upon her lashes. There she sat, with the firelight playing over her and the dog, which had crept half into her lap, with his pointed nose under her arm, contented and happy.

"And I thought he didn't care!" she murmured, with her far-off gaze upon the coals, "and that he was just going not to mind anything about me any more." And then, out stole another tear, as though to wonder at Deborah Gibbs' strange mood.

At last she laid the dog's head gently down upon the rug. "It must be done, dog—he ought to know about it;" and rising, she looked around for the writing desk she remembered to have seen somewhere, and in doing so, stared again at the rich furnishings which surrounded her. "Miss Gibbs, I guess you'd better put on your stockings and shoes, if you're going to live here," she said, gathering up her stockings. "I wonder if I ever will get used to it. I'm 'most afraid I'll break something." And then her eye fell upon the oval glass again. "Oh, that baby! What a beauty it is! Looks kind of deady, though, it's so white." And she turned to the desk.

Upon her books she found Mr. Deering's note. Only a few lines, to the effect that he hoped Deb would like his gift and take good care of it. Don was the name to which the dog answered. Dorman trusted she would try to take fresh courage for meeting any difficulties in her path. He was sorry he had not been able to say good-by to her save by letter.

Deb winced as she thought of what the fate of that good-by letter had been.

As Deb folded the note she softly said, "Don!" by way of test, and was satisfied when the head of the dog came up, and the sharp, pointed ears went back at the well-known sound. Taking a block of school-paper, Deb began:

DEAR DORMAN: I must tell you how glad I am to get the dog. It seems just like home, having him here, because I used to see him when I went to the mines. He doesn't seem to mind a bit being here, but is stretched out as contented as can be. It was awfully good in you to send him, after I was so mad about your going off without coming here again. Of course you don't know much about that, but I was just tearing mad, and I wouldn't read your letter, but burned it up, because I had thought maybe I should go back with you.

I've got the splendidest room you ever saw, full of pictures, and chairs with blue ribbon on 'em, and a couch and cushions, and the sweetest baby made out of marble you ever saw in all your life. And I can lock my door too—Mrs. Avery said I might, and not let anybody in unless I am a mind to. And it all came as quick as that—the room and the dog—when I didn't think of such a thing, you know. It's just as you say—you never can tell. There I was fretting so because I thought you didn't care any more for me and was disappointed in me, so that you weren't going to have anything more to do with me, and was minding so having Genie always spying around and sneering; and then, just as you said it was when you and Dan were down digging in the mine—as quick as that—it was all changed. Dorm, I've made up my mind. I'm going right straight to the top of things here; there's no use standing round any longer.

I've thought it all out since supper—the dog and I have—and I'm going right at the books as soon as I get this written. Mrs. Avery says it doesn't make no difference if I'm not like other folks, so I sha'n't bother my head about that any more, but pitch right in and see if a set o' girls that don't amount to a row of pins can do what I can't. So you want to stop saying that I'm not the sort of girl you thought I was. Oh, I had a tussle with Paul, and gave him a shaking, and his mother came to pitch in about it hammer and tongs. But she didn't get much chance, the Averys stood by me so. But I'm not going to do it again. It's not just fair standing by them, when I treat them so, and they relatives of the Averys, you know—Mr. Avery said so. I suppose Dan was surprised to get the letter from Jimmy I sent this morning. It was about that Paul and I had the set-to; but it's all right now.

Yours very respectfully,
DEBORAH GIBBS.

It was the first time since having faced her difficulties that Deb had said, "I will get to the top!"

Having folded her letter and addressed it with great care, she opened her books and began in earnest with the lessons that heretofore had seemed nonsensical and of no account—opened them at the beginning, and

reviewed carefully and painstakingly former lessons, and then settled down upon the ones in which she had failed that very day. The ebony clock upon the mantel ticked away knowingly, while the dog slept until a servant came at last to take him to the coach-house. In at the door which the servant had left ajar, peered a pair of laughing blue eyes.

"I'm dying, Deb, to know how it goes."

"Oh, come in! I want to tell you something, Maybelle!" said Deb, jumping up and shutting the books, and piling them one upon the other.

"Why, how pretty you look! Your cheeks are as red as roses!" said Maybelle, dropping down upon the rug.

"Are they? That's because I've been so busy getting started. I've made up my mind, Maybelle, that I'm going to the top of things."

"What things?"

"Why, arithmetic and grammar, and what folks say about me."

"You are the strangest girl I ever saw, Deb. I haven't the slightest idea what it is you're talking about."

"Well, you will when I get there," said Deborah.

"Oh, Deb, mamma says you must leave your door open nights, so that she could come in if anything happened. Do you know there's a door right by your bed that opens into my room—the one you've been having? I'm to have that room back again now, and Genie hers alone."

"I'd no idea I was so close," said Deb, getting up to investigate.

Sure enough, there was the door; and, drawing back the bolt, Deb found herself in her old quarters. How natural it seemed! It was rather pleasant, after all, to think she was so near Maybelle. To tell the truth, she had stood a trifle in awe of the space back of the heavy portieres and lace-draped bed, and now here was Maybelle's room close at hand.

"I don't see how your mother came to let me have this beautiful room," said Deborah, beginning to prepare for bed, Maybelle having brought her night-dress back with her to Deb's fire.

"She thought at first she couldn't," said Maybelle softly; "and then she thought she'd better. You see it used to be Aunt Adele's, and mamma thought so much of auntie, and nobody's had the room since. I thought mamma would surely make herself sick crying, when she was in here getting the things fixed."

"Why—is—she—dead?" asked Deborah in an awed voice.

"Don't you know? She was drowned two years ago, when she and Miss Blossom were at the beach. Oh, I thought it would kill poor mamma! The things here are what she had got for herself, you know."

"Where?"

"Oh, everywhere! Baby there, she got in Florence, Italy. She bought it of a man who was 'most starving, she said. He'd made Baby after his own baby, and when he got poor he didn't like to sell it, but kept it for a long time; and then when he had to, he couldn't get anyone to buy it. Auntie said he was 'most beside himself for joy when she said she'd buy it. He wanted it to go into nice hands, you know. Auntie never saw the room after Baby came—and she was so afraid it wouldn't come without breaking. Don't you think auntie's lovely?" And Maybelle looked toward the picture hanging above the sleeping child.

"Is that your aunt?" said Deborah. "I thought it was you, till I saw the comb in her hair."

"Mamma says I look like auntie, but it doesn't seem so to me."

"Girls!" came from the hall; and with a tap Mrs. Avery entered. "Getting ready for bed, are you? That's right; I thought it time."

"I'm telling Deb about auntie," said Maybelle.

"Do not tell the sad things only," said Mrs. Avery, in a sweet, patient way. "Auntie wouldn't have us too sorrowful, you know." And she added, in the confidential way she sometimes used when speaking to her younger daughter, "It is better for Deb to have the room, isn't it?"

She turned and laid her hand kindly upon Deb's shoulder. "I hope you will be happy here," she said, as she put her arms around the slender girl and drew her toward her in a way that touched the lonely stranger. Before she was really aware of the why or wherefore, Deb was leaning her head upon Mrs. Avery's shoulder, and tears were dropping quietly.

"It's very good of you, I'm sure, to give me the room," she murmured brokenly. "I will try to do as you want me to." And raising her head, Deborah saw that Maybelle's place was vacant.

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Avery; "and I think you will find it easier now. It was a mistake, our not giving you this room before."

"But I don't feel as though I ought to take it," said Deborah.

"It is just as the dear one would wish, were she here to speak to us," said Mrs. Avery.

"I was telling Maybelle that I'm going to start straight for the top now," said Deborah shyly.

"I thought you would reach that decision. You can if only you will say the word. Only, Deb," and Mrs. Avery looked down still more solicitously into the face of the girl, "while you are trying to push your way up, you will not forget that something more than push is needed! You pray every day, do you not, dear?"

"Yes'm; I say 'Now I lay me,' and 'Our Father which art in heaven,'" said Deb.

"That is well; but you want more besides—a way of going to God with everything that concerns you—taking it to him and saying, 'Help me to get through with it.' It is such a comfortable way to live, Deb—knowing there

is a strength greater than our own to fall back upon."

Deb stood looking down, rolling and unrolling her handkerchief.

"Will you try that way, Deb?"

"Yes'm; and—I'm sorry I get mad so quick."

"Yes. And you'll try to grow gentle and quiet in your ways," said Mrs. Avery kindly, "so there'll be no need of anyone's thinking Deb Gibbs is not a girl worth being!"

"I will try," said Deb, flashing a bright, honest look upon Mrs. Avery; and Mrs. Avery felt confident that she would keep her word.

The first perfect lessons Deborah Gibbs recited in that school, she gave her teachers the next day. Miss Wickfield was astonished, Miss Darrow was glad that the "talking to" she had given Deb the day before had had an effect; while Miss Yocum, in charge of the study-room, missed something that had become familiar of late, and, looking around shortly before noon, realized that she had not been obliged to call Deborah Gibbs to order once that morning. Looking at the girl, who was bending low over her desk with her fingers in her ears, her eyes shut, and her lips moving rapidly as she conned the rules in her book, the teacher wondered as to this strange transformation. Would it last? or was it too good for that?

But those who feared that Deborah would not hold out, did not know her. As regularly as clock-work after this, did she revolve from one lesson to another, with exactly so much time saved for practicing her music lesson between whiles. Nothing had power to turn her. Maybelle missed the long talks in the twilight, and the Downings the friendly visits, though the latter laid it to the vanishing of the snow upon the hill. But little thought for snow-crowned hills and red pointers had Deb these days. Genevieve looked, wondered, and then threw out hints about "new brooms sweeping clean." But Mrs. Avery held out a steady, helpful, guiding hand continually; and that Mrs. Avery showed such confidence in what she could accomplish, helped Deborah wonderfully.

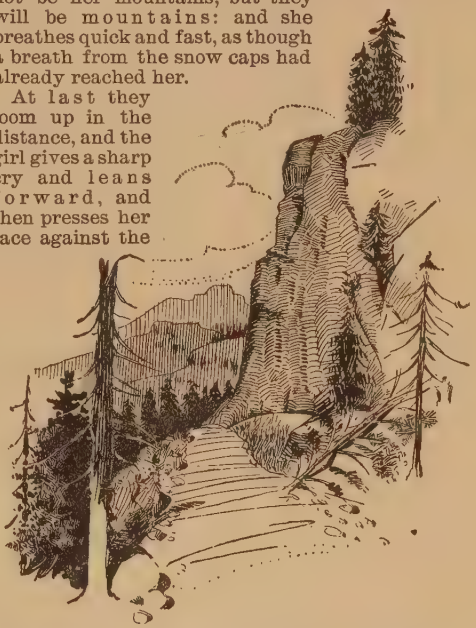
CHAPTER XXII.

A WEEK TO BE REMEMBERED.

A MORNING late in June. Over the lifeless plains where no hospitable homes, no trickling streams nor luxuriant verdure greet the eye, steams along the heavily loaded

train, westward bound. Over the waste of sagebrush and cacti the sun creeps higher and higher, and still on sweeps the moving train over the trackless desert. Straight down pour the rays, and field-glasses are rubbed up, luncheon-baskets are rapped free of crumbs, and two-days-old papers are folded away. They are nearing the further borders.

By the window of one of the drawing-room cars a young girl sits, eagerly straining her eyes for the first glimpse of the mountains. She has heard someone say "Black Hills," and has been all alertness since. They will not be her mountains, but they will be mountains: and she breathes quick and fast, as though a breath from the snow caps had already reached her.



At last they loom up in the distance, and the girl gives a sharp cry and leans forward, and then presses her face against the window to hide her tears. Two years and over have passed since Deborah Gibbs said farewell to her beloved mountains.

"Well, Deb?"

Deborah starts as a hand is placed upon her shoulder. She has heard nothing of the stir and excitement which the sight of the mountains brought into their midst; nothing of the exclamations of delight and wonder, and then of weariness, as it is realized that the trip over the plains is nearly ended; is not conscious that Cheyenne's sunburned borders—

Cheyenne, of which she has heard all her life, but has never seen—are even now lying before the travelers upon the white waste in the distance.

"Mrs. Downing says it is time you were picking up. She has done the best she could."

"Oh!" and Deb adjusts her hat, looks for her gloves, and rising, crosses to a lady waiting for her.

"I thought you were never coming back to life again, Deborah," the lady says.

Deborah laughs. "But think how long it has been since I've seen a mountain! Weren't they grand!"

"Why—yes. But, really, Deb, I should have supposed them a bank of thunder-clouds, if I had not known."

"Oh, I could almost feel the wind blowing from them!" And Deborah turns to take the silk-lined ulster which Mr. Downing has had brushed for her.

"To-morrow you will see what you'll not think thunder-clouds." And with an eager light playing over her face, Deborah buttons the ulster down over her blue serge, arranges the contents of her satchel, draws on her gloves, packs up her books, and, tying a silk handkerchief around her throat, stands ready to leave the train when it shall have come to a stop.

On the thronged platform they take a glance over Cheyenne, step aboard a waiting train, miss the luxuries of the cars they have just left, adjust themselves to circumstances, stand at the rear door a moment and look back upon the thread-like track reaching out over the way they had just come, comfort themselves that so far all is well, and then, as the conductor steps on board, steam away.

As they leave the plains and begin winding their tortuous way among rocks and boulders and foothills, and at last the mountains themselves, Mrs. Downing grows as enthusiastic as Deborah.

"Oh, Deb, do look there!" she cries, as a long, low range stretches away to one side, and the western sun falls upon the lofty snow-caps. "Oh, Ted, why didn't you tell me how beautiful they were?"

Mr. Thaddeus Downing leans back in his leisurely fashion and laughs. "I did the best I could for you, Bertha." This is not Mr. Downing's first visit to Colorado, by any means.

"And is that the way they make things grow?" asks Mrs. Downing, as the irrigating trenches come into sight. "The ground looks like ashes. They'll never make anything grow there in the world. They ought to know that by this time the squashes are more than half way through life." And then Mrs. Downing laughs, realizing how funny her assertion is, in the very face of the squash-vines so green and luxuriant.

As the two who face each other sit talking together, hardly older than her companion does Mrs. Downing look, so lightly has married life touched her, and so sturdily has the young girl crept forward and well-nigh laid hold of the treasures of young womanhood. But little more than two years have passed, yet Mrs. Avery is well content that Deborah shall make a visit to her home, feeling assured that the friends there will not be disappointed in that which persistent effort, aided by the best of outside help, has accomplished. It had brought Deborah's heart up chokingly when Mrs. Downing, running up to her room one day, said:

"Deb, we're going with you!"

The first thing Deborah thought of in that moment was the log hut—with the bedstead, by this time, out in the front yard. She did not mean to be disloyal to home—not by any means—but there was the bed staring at her, with the cottonwoods waving their green leaves above it. What would the Downings think of it all!

"I—do you think you will?" And then Deb stopped, left off buttoning her shoe, and looked up with a red face, feeling that she had blundered.

"Why, Deb! I thought you'd like it," said straightforward Mrs. Downing.

"Well," said Deb bluntly, and then laughing confusedly, "I came near making a fool of myself that time."

"But don't you want us to go?" said Bertha, looking straight into Deborah's eyes.

"I was a fool, that's all," said Deb. "I couldn't help wondering what you'd think of the way you found things."

"Now, Deb, that wasn't nice of you!" and Mrs. Downing's arms went tightly around the girl, as she looked into the flushing face. "Take it right back! Say you're glad, and that there never was such a time as we'll have!"

"You'd get anything you tried to out of me," said Deb, breaking free. "But I don't believe you have the least idea how plainly we folks live out there."

"Just as though we didn't know that different ends of the world live differently!"

Perhaps, more than to any other, the molding and softening of Deborah's character was due to this girl-wife and her husband. Did Deborah drop into moody morbidness, she was railed at until the Slough of Despond was left behind; was she too ambitious, she was checked; not as ambitious as her talents warranted, stimulated; if too diffident, brought forward; pert, dropped; and so on through all the transition state from awkward girlhood to early young womanhood.

"Of course, Deborah," Mrs. Downing had said when talking over the new plan, "we shall only make the trip with you as far as your home, and then, unless your father consents to your sweeping around the circle with us, that will be the last you will see of us, unless, perhaps, we meet for coming home."

So it had been arranged, and the journey Deborah had expected to make alone, or under the care of strangers, had been shared with friends and every mile of it enjoyed.

Some time after nightfall the cars swept up beside the Denver platform, and the far-famed din of the Denver cabmen greeted them.

"My goodness, Deb!" cried Mrs. Downing, with her fingers in her ears, while frowns crowded all the bright beauty from her face, as she stood waiting for her husband to look up the baggage. "Who ever heard such a racket! Why, I should not think it would be tolerated. We'd have them locked up in no time at home, if they made such a fuss calling out carriages."

But Deb was too near home now to mind trivial annoyances, and she laughed at Mrs. Downing for doing so.

A little after noon of the next day Deborah and her party—we place Deborah in advance, for since nearing familiar ground she had crept to a foremost place, pointing out and explaining—left the cars for the last time. Deborah drew a long breath as she realized that she was almost home, and then up came a half-formed sigh at thought of the log-house flanked with the log-homes of the feathered tribe. The next moment she could have boxed her own ears for her disloyalty.

Though their journey was so nearly ended, it was not here that Deborah expected to meet her father, but at the Cliff House, further up the mountain. A half-hour later, inside a mountain coach they started on again, and in an hour's time swept around the circle of the fountain and were landed upon the piazza of the Cliff House, swarming with gay life, show and wealth, just as when years before Deb had taken eggs and butter to the back entrance, or when as a diffident girl she had stood by Mrs. Avery's side ready to launch forth.

Deborah glanced along the drive for her father, almost dreading to see the shackly yellow wagon she remembered so well. But neither father nor vehicle was in sight, and so with the Downings she passed through the throng, always thickest at stage time, and stood chatting in the parlor while Mr. Downing had gone to engage rooms.

"You're sure you are all here?" said Mrs. Downing, looking Deborah over. "I do hope you'll get down to-morrow. We must be together all we can; Mr. Downing and I are only booked here for a week, you know!"

"Oh, yes, I'll be over; there are so many places I want to take you to. But I must keep a lookout for father." And Deb stepped through the long window out on to the piazza, where the crowd was now thinning. No one who had known Deb in the old days, would have thought—seeing the young girl at the further end of the long piazza, a bit of crimson silk showing among the velvet loops of her dark blue felt hat, her gloved hand holding her natty umbrella, while her ulster was thrown across her arm—that she and the "egg-girl" were one. No one save perhaps Mrs. Newton, wife of the proprieter, who was even then coming with outstretched hand toward her. But Mrs. Newton had glanced at the register and had read "Deborah Gibbs" among the arrivals. Of course Deborah recognized Mrs. Newton—why should she not?—and stepped forward to meet her.

"Why, my dear girl, how you have changed!" and the hand was grasped and shaken heartily. "Mr. Deering has been here for you once."

"Oh, he came, did he?" said Deborah. She had been listening unconsciously for her father's rather loud voice.

"He has just gone to the Crane Ranch. It is time for him to be back now. But how you have changed!"

At that moment a span of high-stepping bays swept up the drive, and on the front seat of the two-seated carriage Deborah saw Dorman Deering, and—yes—Dan! Dan, just as he had been, only more smiling and happy. Dorman threw the reins to the one in waiting, and came with his brother to where the little party stood, and as Mr. Downing appeared at that moment, all was excitement.

"Oh, I'm so glad to get home!" said Deb, shaking Dorman's extended hand, and then taking Dan's. "You haven't altered a mite, Dan."

"You have," said Daniel.

Deborah turned and presented Mr. and Mrs. Downing in an easy way that made Dorman Deering, thinking of it afterward, wonder as to how the girl had got the hang of it all so quickly.

"Well," he said, "are you all ready?" And seeing Deb make a move as though to bid her friends good-by, he added, "They expect me to bring you all."

"Not to-night," said Mrs. Downing.

"Why, certainly, if you are not too tired."

"But we had no thought of going over to-night," said Mrs. Downing, glancing at Deb. But Deb was looking at the fountain.

"They'll be very much disappointed if you do not come," said Dorman.

Mrs. Downing felt annoyed at the turn things had taken. She knew, as well as though Deborah had told her, where the girl's thoughts were, and she was vexed that they were expected to be guests at the Gibbs' home—that is, under the circumstances. But Mr. Downing took in nothing of the circumstances, and made matters worse by falling in at once with the plan.

"Why not go, Bertha? We shall be off in a day or two, no one knows where."

"That is what we thought," said Mr. Deering.

"They'll be awfully disappointed if you don't come," said Dan shyly.

Deb turned abruptly from watching the children at play near the fountain. "Why not come? As well to-night as to-morrow," she said a little sharply. It was not like Deb's usual tone, and she could have wept the next moment to think of it—and she loved them so at home, too!

"Oh, yes," said Dorman, looking around for the satchels, "it is the better plan, I know." And he and Dan exchanged a sly little look.

Mr. Downing dodged into the hotel office to tell the clerk to retain their room and baggage for them.

As Dorman helped Deb in, he leaned forward and said, "Never mind, lass; they'll like it there."

Deb flushed to think that her thoughts had been interpreted, and roused herself to undo what had been done.

Neither Mrs. Downing nor Deb enjoyed the ride. But Mr. Downing, on the front seat, did; and so did Dan, tucked in between him and his brother. Every little while Dan would pinch his own arm, so happy was he to think he was really there, and Deb was back with them and—oh, ever so much besides!

As they climbed steadily up among the peaks, Dorman Deering played well the part of host and entertainer. But when Cone Rock, lit by the western sun, raised its head before them, Deborah grew excited, and in her delight all past and coming trouble was lost sight of.

"Oh, Dorm, when we get to the creek, let Dan and me get out and walk. I do so want to go through the sumacs!"

They all laughed at Deb's sudden enthusiasm, and Dorman was well pleased at sight of the girl's bright face.

"What do you say, lad?" he said, turning to Dan.

"We'll get home first!"

"That's as well, isn't it?"

And so it was that, pushing her way along the path by the creek, and tearing through sumacs and wild currant bushes, Deb came upon her home after her long absence. Stock still she stood, her eyes strained, her breath coming fast, while the red flamed into her face. A moment thus, and then she turned upon Dan, whose face was glowing with expectancy.

"Oh, Dan, what made them come it over me so! Why didn't they tell me, before I made such a fool of myself!" And with tears blinding her eyes, she dashed on before Dan could utter a word.

The mother had heard Deb's voice, and hastened to the door to welcome her, and there the girl saw her, a happy flush on her thin face, and looking just as she had looked in the old days. But her surroundings, how different! Instead of the log hut with its sod roof, stretched a brown house, with hospitable doors thrown open, while wide-armed chairs rested on a broad, vine-draped piazza.

"Oh, mother, why didn't you tell me!" cried Deb from a distance. "It was too bad to keep it from me!"

The next moment the little woman was in her grasp, and the strong young arms were around her, while the mother's thin face was nestled close to the girl's burning one. In that moment Deborah knew how dear to her was her mother.

From the spring came the father with his brimming pail, eager for his share of welcome. And then up swept the buggy, and eager questions, explanations, words of welcome and of admiration fell from every side.

"Didn't I tell you they'd like it, lass!" said Dorman on the back balcony.

"But it was too bad of you all!" said Deb, her eyes bright with happiness.

In the cool dining-room they soon gathered, where the mountains before the long windows received more attention than did the chicken, until all settled down to the tempting meal, with sharpened appetites.

And so it was that the home-coming Deborah had tried not to dread, and yet had dreaded, was gotten over, and behind the pantry door, while reaching for a plate, she lingered for just a moment, so determined were the glad tears to have their way.

"But it was too bad of you all," Deb said later, as, the Downings having wisely gone to their own room—a pretty one furnished in matting and cane — the conversation between the reunited family took a more confidential turn; "I almost dreaded seeing the log house." And she stopped, as though fearing she had said too much.

"Well, I 'lowed as how that was about the way you'd feel," said her father, "and I told mother we might as well go the hull figger, now we'd begun." And he shifted his legs and gave a pull to the pantaloons that had forded the creek and had shrunk a little from their original length. "'Twas 'most too much, though, for your mother—keepin' on 't;" and he laughed.

He was just the least bit afraid of this city girl who had stepped in to fill Deb's place, —who was Deb and was not Deb—and he took a sly glance towards her from the corner of his eyes. But his fatherly heart was, for all, very full of happiness; and as he had watched Deborah flit around saying good-by to Dorman and Dan, who had returned to the mine, and helping to make their guests at home, his eye had brightened, and he had gone out to Brindle for her flowing treasure with his thoughts in a tumult of ecstasy, and had confided to his pet, as he threw down the fodder for the night, "I 'lowed as she could hold her head up with the best on 'em if she sot out."

"Of course, Deb," said Mrs. Gibbs, also feeling a little in awe of the girl she was calling "Deb" so familiarly, yet with whom she could not yet feel familiar, "we wanted everything to be as you'd like it best, and it was kind of hard not to ask how you'd like the house fixed. But Dorman helped us a sight—he's got to know so much about things—and we went to him for 'most everything. I'm so glad it's all as you like it."

"I couldn't help liking it," said Deborah, slipping into a jacket, the mountain air seemed so penetrating after her long absence from it. "I am almost glad, after all, you didn't tell me, for I should have wanted to come home and see it all. What will Maybelle say! I'm 'most afraid I sha'n't want to go back again," and she looked over to the firs showing darkly against the sky.

"I'm sure it's just as you say about that," answered Mr. Gibbs. "I 'low as how there

ain't anybody a-goin' to make you go if you ha'n't a mind to;" and he laughed as he rubbed his knee knowingly.

"But I'd rather hate to give up, now I've begun," said Deborah. "I'm up with Genevieve now, and I've worked awfully hard to get there, she had such a start of me. She's a good scholar, Genie is. But, oh, I can't tell you how good it seems to be here again! I don't see how I can wait for daylight, to begin climbing. You don't know, mother, how I've longed for and missed the mountains!" And Deborah's voice was tremulous with its weight of glad tenderness at being once more where her heart had so often been.

Night settled down, and the quiet couple, used to their early bedtime, deferred inquiries concerning the many things they wished to know, and the three separated.

How strange, deliciously, bewilderingly strange, this first night in her new home seemed to Deborah! How odd to be in her room—that is, a room that contained her old treasures of agates and birds'-nests, and a rocking-chair of childhood!—to be told it was her room, and yet to look around upon things hard to associate with home! But it was a pretty room at the very front of the house, where she could get the first peep at the sun as it rose above the crags, and Deborah could hardly bring herself to fold away all the strange thoughts the day had brought, and to close her eyes in sleep.

As the bays that night made their way up the mountain road leading to the white cottage by the mine, Dorman asked:

"Well, lad, what do you think of her?"

"I don't believe, Dorm, I ever shall get to feel as if I knew her again," Dan answered.

"Oh, yes, you will. But she has altered, though, hasn't she?" And had it been lighter, an expression of satisfaction might have been seen playing around Dorman Deering's mouth.

"But she wears her hair so crinkly around her face," Dan said.

"Yes; that's the way the girls all do there."

"But she don't seem a bit like our Deb," Dan affirmed, a hint of disappointment in his voice: it was always somewhat hard for Daniel in his shyness to newly adjust himself to things, and now he added with a little sigh:

"I don't believe she'll care about the agates I've got her."

"You just wait till morning, lad; she'll seem more like herself to you to-morrow—only nicer, of course." And then he added, as though to himself, "It is wonderful how she's got it all so quickly!" And the horses were urged on a little faster as the white home came in sight.

But Dan was not satisfied. All the Deb he knew of was the one who had scrambled with bare feet over the wet rocks, or hunted eggs among the hay, and this Deb was not that one. To be sure, he had seen Deb when, in her new attire, she had started off with the Averys, but then she had simply been Deb in new clothes; and now—well, Dan did not just know how it was now, and he went to bed with a feeling of disappointment where he had expected only delight and satisfaction.

"But she's awful nice looking," he murmured to himself as he turned on his pillow, "only—well, I'll ask Dorm if I hadn't best not wear my old coat while she's here."

The sun had just looked above the pines into the room where the two brothers were at breakfast, when there was the sound of hoofs on the walk outside, and the next moment Deb reined in her horse beside the piazza.

"The top of the morning to you!" cried Dorman, pushing back his chair.

"Oh, I got that up at the spring! You don't know how good it does seem to be free again!" and giving her bridle to Dan—who had forgotten all about feeling afraid of Deb and had run to the piazza as soon as he caught the first glimpse of their visitor—Deb came through the long window to the breakfast-table.

"You're just in time," said Dorman, drawing up a chair near and placing it for her.

"Mary, we must have some more eggs; we've company to breakfast," he called.

"I must only take a bite. I'm half-starved," and Deb glanced over the neatly arranged table, "but mother won't like it if I'm not there the first morning."

"Oh, you must eat, now you're here," said Dan, his face flushed and eager, so glad was he that Deb had come straight to them the first thing.

"Then you'll have to go back with me to make peace with mother," said Deb, taking off her riding-gloves.

"He'll be glad enough to do that, I'll warrant," Dorman said, beaming a smile upon Dan; and then he added, as a neatly-dressed woman entered, bearing hot muffins: "This is Mrs. Ewyn, Deborah — Bill's Mary, you know."

"Oh, yes," said Deb, "I had forgotten whom you had with you. Good-morning, Mrs. Ewyn!"

"Good-morning, Miss! But I don't believe I'd know who it was I was saying good-morning to if they hadn't told me."

"They all say that," said Deb. "But do you think I have changed so very much, Dorm?"

"Very much," said Dorman, passing the eggs. "Dan, here, was afraid last night he never again should feel as if he knew you."

"Now, Dorm, you shouldn't tell everything!" Dan protested, flushing; at which they all laughed.

"That's the little tot, Deb," Dorman said, as a tiny girl peeped in at the kitchen door.

"How she has grown! I remember you had her at our house once, in a white dress and pink sack," said Deborah.

"I wouldn't have thought you'd remember," said Mary, looking pleased, as she poured a cup of coffee for Deb.

"No, you mustn't tempt me. Mother's will be waiting for me, and it would not be kind to leave it untasted the first morning; she knows I dote on coffee." And then, as her face softened, she said, turning to Dorman, as though he were the only one present, "You don't know what it is to be at home again, after having been so long away!"

It seemed as natural for this girl to turn her deeper thoughts Dorman Deering's way as for a flower to turn its face sunward.

"I'm sure it's good to have her here, isn't it, Dorm?" Dan said, entirely forgetting his impressions of the previous night.

"Yes, lad."

Deborah ate her egg, with a tiny bit of muffin, and then arose.

"I really must be going—and the Downings there for mother to wait on, too! Come, Dan, finish your breakfast with us at home. I haven't seen you on Gray yet."

"Go with her, lad," said Dorman; adding, "He hardly knows what to do with his time, now school's out.'

"He'll not be troubled now. Oh, Dan, I see the magpies have got a nest in the tree by the bridge again!"

As Dan galloped away with Deb, he remembered that he had his old coat on, but he was too happy to care.

And this was the beginning of good times for Deborah. Up with the first ray which glinted the pine-crowned crests around her; scaling crags, and hunting up old haunts, and carefully culling treasures to bear back to Maybelle, the days were all too short and the nights too quick in coming.

The Downings stayed a week—a week crowded full of gay little excursions, with Dan and Deb for pilots. When Mr. Deering could get away, he was of the party, but his bays and light carriage were always at their disposal, and so the Downings could well call it a week to be remembered—one to stand out through a lifetime. At the end of that time they took their flight southward over ranges of which Deborah had always

longed to see the other side, but which she felt she could not now spare the time for out of her short two-months vacation. But with a stout girl to help her mother in the kitchen, Deborah was free to flit here and there among the home scenes, and always by her side was Dan, her fair-haired, loyal knight.

The others grew young again as they saw the happiness of the two. Besides, there were for them long talks in the gloaming, and for the parents the pleasure of having Deborah beside them on Sunday at the service in the white-spired church, and at the village on gala days, such as the Fourth of July. Yes, it was a glad, sweet time for them all.

CHAPTER XXIII.

KEEPING AN EYE OUT FOR DAN.

IT WAS a day in late August. Up to the very top of Cone Rock had Deb and Dan climbed, and now upon its smooth table-like top they sat sunning themselves, and eating the cheese sandwiches they had brought. Before them like a panorama stretched woods and hills, deep shades of green and russet browns, while a little to one side the tall chimneys of the mine pricked through the piñon-tops.

"I suppose you're glad you're going back?" said Dan, looking off over the landscape. Deb's vacation was fast drawing to a close.

"No—yes!" said Deb, looking down. "I hate to leave it all here, and yet I rather long to be at it again—all the things I've set myself to do, you know."

"But it's nice there," Dan said.

"Why, yes, I s'pose so. I don't have much time, though, to think about that part when I'm there. When one is climbing, one just thinks of getting to the top, you know."

"But the music in the churches, Deb, and the carriages running so smoothly over the streets, and the flowers in the rich folks' windows! Oh, I am sure I should think it nice if I were there again!"

Deb turned and looked at her companion curiously. There was a weary note in Dan's voice as he said these last words, and now Deb thought she saw a tired look about the eyes and mouth. Dan was looking off over the woodland stretches below, and did not know that the girl's eye was upon him. The more she looked, the less did Deb like what she saw—something as though there was being carried along a load each day, which perhaps was not laid off at night.

"Dan!" she said, almost sharply—the delicacy of this boy had always been a little rasping to her strong nerves—"aren't you happy here?"

Dan flushed, but answered hurriedly: "Of course! I'd hate to have Dorm hear you ask any such thing as that."

Deb was not deceived, and Dan felt that she was not, and he began to eat as though he were nearly starved, and to drink as though he could not get water enough from the little canteen they had brought with them. But it was difficult to turn Deb Gibbs from any scent she had ferreted out. At last Dan said, taking

up the subject just where it had been dropped:

"Of course, it's lonesome when the folks all go back summers, and I sometimes feel as though I'd like to go straight ahead on a pavement again; it's sort of tiring here—it's always a step down or a step up—never just level."

Again Deb looked at her companion, as his eyes were turned to the woods. What a girl's face it was, showing under the round cap! And his wrists! She felt an inclination to take one between her thumb and finger and crush it like an egg-shell.

"Dan, why don't you go back with me when I go? Dorm would let you."

"No, don't, Deb!" said Dan hurriedly. "Don't speak about such a thing!"

"But why not? He expects you to go there to school sometime."

"But I'd hate to have him think I'd leave him a day sooner than I need to. I can go to school at the village for a while yet. I suppose Jimmy Stiles likes it there?"

"Why, I guess so. He has to work hard, though, out of school. I've been thinking of asking Dorman what he thought of Jimmy's coming out here. He'll have to get to work for himself soon."

"I suppose he could come. Dorm lets boys have a chance. It would be nice to have Jimmy here;" and the lad's eyes brightened, and he added a little hesitatingly, "You know, Jimmy knew mother!" And then Dan's voice broke; he was not himself. He got up hastily and walked to the extreme edge of the rock. Deb looked at him for a moment. A little later she stood beside him.

"What is it, Dan?" she said kindly, just as Mrs. Avery would have spoken.

"Oh, nothing!" said the boy huskily. "Only —Dorm's pretty busy sometimes, and you can't always like your books." He stopped, loosened a stone with his foot, and finally tried to laugh. "I guess I ain't like other boys," he added, looking up. "But when I get home nights and the house is so still except for the little tot—and she's not mine—and Dorman is talking in the office with the men, and there's no one there but Mary, it seems as though—I —couldn't always live without mother!" The words out, Dan looked straight into his companion's face to see if he was understood.

An expression of wonder crept into Deborah's eyes. Then she turned and looked off over the pines. She had never thought of all this before—had almost forgotten Dan ever had a mother, except when talking with Jimmy, who was full of Dan's mother. It was now as though a glimpse into another's life had been suddenly given her. At last she said:

"I don't think Dorman would like your not telling him, if he knew."

"Now, Deb, don't! It would be mean, and he doing everything for me! He's just dreading the time when I'll have to leave him; but he's planning and saving for it, though. Don't let him know I'm ever anything but jolly. I'm everything he's got in the world to plan for, you know, Deb. And—well, Dorm doesn't care to plan just for himself as some do."

"I wish you were going back with me. You're too much alone," said sensible Deborah; "they're so chirky at the Averys' and the Downings'."

"No, don't say anything about my going yet!"

"But you'll have to go sometime—Dorm said so—when you get all you can get here."

"Yes," said Dan, and added in a still more confidential tone, "Do you know, Deb, I sometimes feel as though I couldn't do all that's expected. That is, it sort of tires me to think about getting it all—all that's needed to make the grand man Dorman expects me to be."

"Daniel," said Deborah, "I don't believe it's good for you, being here. It's not the place for you. You never did take it easy here; you are not strong enough for it. I can tire you all out climbing now. I doubt your having been made for life in the mountains. I wish Mrs. Avery had you."

"There! I guess we won't talk any more about it, Deb," said Dan. "It doesn't seem just kind to Dorm—and he doing so much for me. You won't ever say anything about it?" he added anxiously. And as Deb gathered up the basket and canteen from the ground without a word, he said still more pleadingly: "I couldn't sleep nights if I thought you'd ever let Dorm know anything of what I've said—it's nothing, you know. I'm all right now. Say, Deb, you won't say anything to Dorm?"

So Deb promised, and the two went down the mountain. Evidently Dan regretted what he had been led into saying, and would gladly have erased it entirely from Deb's mind, but his very anxiety to do so made it linger there with the more indelible impression.

That evening Deb said to her mother, who was busy in the kitchen over the last things to be done for the night:

"I wish you'd keep an eye out for Dan, mother, when I'm gone. I believe he's homesick all the time, if he'd own it."

"Why, I'm sure he seems happy."

"I never did quite understand him," answered Deb, reaching to the top shelf for a cooky. "What other folks likes he doesn't. I guess he misses his mother. Jimmy says there never were two as near together as Dan and his mother."

"I suppose it is kind of lonesome for Dan. I guess Dorman is pretty well taken up with the mine; they say Mr. Bostwick consults him about everything. But there's Mary."

"What is Mary Ewyn for Dan?" said Deborah, catching the crumbs in her palm, and adding, after a moment, "Dan never did seem to take root here. Then he tires out so. He can't climb now worth a cent; and he'll turn white at the sight of a dead chicken. He ought to have been a girl—Maybelle's just like him."

As Deb passed up the stairs she turned back to say: "You mustn't say I said anything, mother; Dan doesn't want Dorm to know.

But try to keep an eye out for him, won't you? Dorm somehow doesn't see things like others. He's expecting so much of Dan."

Early in September Deborah was back with the Averys again, taking up the old life with a better appreciation of its opportunities, and also with the ties of home holding her more strongly than ever before.

As soon as the Downings were back from their trip—which was not until October—Deborah continued her painting lessons that she had commenced earlier in the year, with Mr. Downing as her teacher. Tall and straight as an arrow Deborah was shooting up, with a rapidity realized only when the last year's dresses were brought out for remodeling. A year older than Genevieve, her backwardness had at first made her seem younger; but now, up with her in all save music—a talent that Genevieve possessed in a rare degree—Deborah carried herself in a way that proved she need own to no inferiority. Deb's steady push forward had been a source of annoyance to proud Genevieve, and though she did not stoop to show it in the small ways of their earlier acquaintance, she entertained little love for Deborah, and in her inmost heart would have been glad to make her take a little lower place. Deborah knew something of this, but it did not cause her much thought. In a measure, she had taken Mr. Avery's advice and had learned to live somewhat above the litt'e daily pinpricks that had such power at first to mar her life; or, rather, she had learned the worth of climbing with eyes on the heights.

Jimmy Stiles had gone out to the mountains, Dorman Deering had written his people that he would stand by the boy, if he wished to take a start, and so, well pleased with the opening for him, every nerve had been strained in that straitened household to give him a good fitting-out, and Jimmy had gone. By what Dan wrote, Deb judged he found it a great comfort to have Jimmy there, though of course not much could the lads see of one another, with one working at his books and the other toiling in the mines "like a Trojan," according to Dorman. But the same roof covered them at night, "And we are together all day Sunday," Dan wrote Deb.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HELPING A COWARD.

IT WAS early in December. Over heaps of bright wools and gay embroidery, preparations for Christmas were going on. Every moment of time was twice counted, and every fragment of leisure eagerly seized.

In the edge of one evening Deborah left the Downings' door and hurried toward home. She was at work upon her first picture—taken from one Mr. Downing had painted from a sketch he made of the bit of mountain-landscape back of her father's house; Cone Rock in the foreground, with the creek at its foot, and the white heads of Chalk Cliffs falling away to one side. Deb had used up the last bit of daylight in her anxiety that the picture should be done in time to send home for Christmas, and now she hurried along in the gathering gloaming.

There was a quick step back of her, and looking up, she saw that Paul Greyson had overtaken her. She slackened her step, that Paul might pass on with a nod as was usual; but as she did so, the lad also walked more slowly, and kept even pace with her, saying something about the evening's being cold. The next moment he dropped his usual tone and asked, as though the thought had just come to him:

"Oh, Deb, you haven't a spare ten or two that you are not going to use for a while?"

"H'm!" said Deborah; "I thought there was something in the wind, you were so wonderfully polite."

Paul winced.

"What's the use, anyway, in our being so grumpy, as long as we have to slip along together?"

"Oh, hush!" said Deborah, with the bluntness that generally came to the surface when Paul Greyson was near, with his strong perfumery to cover the odor of stale cigar-smoke. Paul was carrying things with a high hand these days. Mrs. Greyson had been sent South for the winter. At first there had been some talk of Paul's going to the Averys' during her absence, but either because that plan had not met with the boy's favor, or for some other cause, he had taken up his quarters as a regular boarder at the academy. With less home-restraint around him, he was, as Deb well knew from words dropped at home, taking a course strongly disapproved of by his uncle, and more than once she had heard it hinted that unless he changed his ways, there was danger for him. All this added to her latent dislike of Paul, and now as he walked beside her, her head was carried in a lofty way that promised little for the favor the youth had determined to ask at her hands.

"If you've come to me for money, you have come to the wrong person, I can tell you that. If I had a dozen spare tens I wouldn't give them to you."

They were approaching the Averys' now.

"No one asked you to give them to me," said Paul; "I only want the use of them for a few weeks, till I can hear from mother."

"Well, you will not get it," and Deborah stopped at the steps of her own door. Turning, she added, "What an apology for a man you will make if you keep on, Paul Greyson!" and passed up the steps.

"I might have known how it would be," muttered Paul. "She'll go straight to Uncle Avery with it, too, likely as not!"

Paul was in no enviable position, with the need of money pushing him from one side—he was in sore need of money—and now, on the other, the fear that Deborah would expose him to his uncle. But had Paul known Deborah better, he would have realized there

was little danger of her going to Mr. Avery with tales concerning his nephew.

It was the week before Christmas, and Deborah's picture was finished. Turning from it to that of Mr. Downing, she saw more difference than she had expected. She was disappointed—she longed to raise the brush and wipe her own from existence, so confident did she feel of doing better on a second trial. But there was no time for that now, so she covered it carefully from sight.

Mr. Downing, looking upon Deb's effort, felt delighted that his young pupil had done so well; while the Averys, when they came to see it, were open in their congratulations. But it looked much better, Deborah acknowledged, from its place on the piano in her own room —the room she had taken so much comfort in during the months it had been hers—than it did when contrasted with Mr. Downing's better work. Deb felt comforted. "It will nearly kill father to think I did it all myself," she murmured as she turned with a lingering gaze from the room.

The getting off of the box, with something in it for each of the home friends—even Mary Ewyn and "the little tot"—was quite a feat, and when it was over Deb felt a reaction, with the stimulus of the last weeks removed.

But there were gifts for their own Christmas tree to help the girls with, and many a stitch to be taken, and sly purchases to be made; so the gap was filled, and Deborah, as feverishly busy as ever, often sat by her own little grate later than the ones having her in charge would have approved.

By a jeweler's show-case Deborah stood late one afternoon, making purchases of a trivial nature for the girls, when, glancing up at the large window already lighted, she started at sight of a face peering in at her. Not because the face was a strange one, but because, being well known, it looked so strangely.

Deborah paid for her purchases and hurried out, feeling sure that Paul had stopped before the window because he had seen her there, and that now he was lurking near. Sure enough, at the next corner she came upon him, standing as though waiting for her.

"For goodness' sake, Paul, what have you been doing to yourself?" and Deb almost held her breath at sight of the change that had been wrought in the youth since their last encounter. Even in the fading light she could see his wan, white face, with dark circles underneath his eyes—whether from dissipation or otherwise she could not tell.

"Oh, Deborah! do have pity and help me!" he cried, clutching at the girl's arm, and barring her further progress.

"Don't stop here, blocking up the way, with every one looking to see what the matter is!" said Deb, shaking herself free and hurrying forward.

"But, Deb, say you'll help me!" implored Paul. "You can if you will, and the whole thing can be hushed up."

"If you think I will have a hand in hushing up anything, Paul Greyson, you're much mistaken," said Deborah, with a scornful glance at the boy at her side, who, though wrapped in a thick overcoat, she could see was shaking from head to foot.

"Don't say that, Deb! My only hope is in you—it won't do for mother and Uncle Avery to get hold of it."

"Whatever it is, out with it, and be done!" said Deb in her sturdy way, yet feeling a sort of pity for the one in whom such a wonderful change had been wrought since their last meeting. Deborah knew nothing of what nights made sleepless by fear and agony can do for a cowardly soul.

"But, Deb, you must say first that you'll help me."

"No, sir! I won't lift my finger unless you make a clean breast of it! I won't paddle around in the dark—I can tell you that."

"But say you'll help me. It's such a little thing, and can be so easily arranged if you only will;" and again Paul laid his hand detainingly upon Deb's arm.

"You'll have the eyes of the police on us if you keep on," she said curtly. Deb had been overexerting herself of late, and her nerves were easily shaken. She longed to run from the one whose very shadow had power to rasp her. But what was it he had been doing? Was it anything likely to affect the Averys?

The two had now entered the square before spoken of as affording a short cut home. Striking out from its well-worn path, Deborah said, as she found they were screened from the passers-by by the scrubby evergreens:

"Now, Paul, if you have anything to say, say it. I'll give you just five minutes to go from the beginning to the end of it!"

"But you'll come down on me so!"

"Just five minutes," said the girl, well-nigh losing command of herself.

"But you don't any of you know what a sight of money it needs to take a fellow through. Mother's forbidden them at the bank to let me have any more, and makes me go to Uncle Avery for it, and he's as close as the bark to a tree. I needed money awfully! I just couldn't get it! You know yourself I tried to get you to let me have some the other day and you wouldn't. Uncle Avery pretended I'd used more than mother'd left for me, but I don't believe a word of it."

"Likely Mr. Avery would say what wasn't true!" Deborah said curtly.

"Well, I'd got to have it. Milbrook said I had, and Sidney was so sick no one thought he ever could get well again."

"What has Sidney Cutter's sickness to do with this?" Deborah asked sharply. She was acquainted with Sidney Cutter, and knew how very ill he had been at the academy, and that he was now convalescent.

"Why, you see, Deb, we were chums—roomed together after Lawton left. And Sid used to have me go with his bank-book and

an order to get money out for him when he was first taken. I never should have thought of it if it hadn't been for that."

"If that's all, I may as well go," said Deborah, growing exasperated at Paul's round-about way.

"Oh, Deb, hold on! I haven't got to it yet. I'm coming to it as fast as I can. But you don't know, Deb, how I was pushed! You see, I owed Milbrook, and he wanted it and threatened to expose the thing. It's against the rules to play for money, and I had used his for playing with Billhorn; and so, though he plays himself, he didn't care about having the thing thrown open, because he wasn't concerned in it. And you see I had the bank-book all the time in the drawer, and knew the money was there. And every one thought Sidney'd got to die, so I felt sure he'd never want it."

"Paul Greyson! Do you pretend to say that you drew money with Sidney Cutter's bank-book for your own use?"

"But I had to have the money, Deb!"

"And that you did not intend to replace it?"

"But I thought he was going to die and would never need it."

"Robbed a dead man, did you?" cried Deborah, bursting into a perfect flame of indignation. "And you think I'll help you? Never!"

"But, Deb, you don't understand. I wrote—I copied Sid's writing. I made it look like his. They can put me into state's prison for it!" and Paul buried his hands in the skirt of the girl's dress to prevent her leaving him.

"And they may, for all me!" said Deborah. "I wouldn't taint a dollar of my father's money by putting it to such a use. Not a dollar!"

"But there's mother, Deb," said Paul, whimperingly.

"Yes! much she is to you! You've done nothing but tear her heart for the last year. It's what you fear is coming to yourself that you are afraid of!" and Deborah freed herself from the boy's grasp.

"But the Averys, Deb! The papers will be full of it. Everybody'll know of it. It'll half kill Maybelle."

"Don't you so much as mention that girl's name!" said Deb, nearly wild with passion and contempt.

"But she'll have to know of it," said Paul. "She'll cry her eyes out. And when she's doing it you can just comfort yourself with knowing you might have saved it all and wouldn't!"

"Why don't you go to Mr. Avery and make a clean breast of it?" said Deb.

"I can't! I don't know what he would do. I'm not his, you know—and he's so terribly just!"

"So am I," said Deborah, throwing off Paul's hands for a second time and disappearing among the shadows of the shrubbery.

We have said that Deborah was one who could come fresh from an encounter and show no signs of it to those around her. But not from such a one as this last. In vain she tried to fit her latch key there in the twilight, and let herself in as usual. She could not, and at last rang to gain entrance.

"Why, Miss Deborah, are you sick?" asked the maid; at which Maybelle, just passing through the hall, turned.

"Why, Deb, what's the matter?" she exclaimed.

"Oh, don't speak to me! I'm fagged and tired to death!" Deb answered, and made her way upstairs.

Maybelle, turning to follow, heard the bolt of Deb's door shot into place, and knew that it was useless.

At the dinner-table Deb strove to hide her distress beneath a cloak of weariness. Mrs. Avery affirmed that she had "worked too steadily," and that "it was what she had feared;" Maybelle "poored" over her, and Mr. Avery recommended a good night's rest, but was sorry, as he had concert tickets for all. Benny begged to be allowed to use Deb's ticket, which was at last agreed to, though Genevieve was quite sure "there'd be no pleasure if Benny was along."

Shortly before eight the carriage door closed on all, even Benny, and Deb, looking down upon the gaslit street, saw them depart, and then dropped the drapery at the window with a sigh.

Another than Deb had seen the departure and noted of whom the party was composed. Fifteen minutes later the door-bell rang, and soon after the maid rapped on Deborah's door.

"Mr. Paul's downstairs and wants to see you."

"I won't see him," said Deborah. But as she saw the look of surprise on the maid's face, she added fretfully: "Oh, I don't know—tell him I'll be down."

"Oh, Paul, why did you come?" she said, closing the parlor door and throwing an angry look upon the cowering boy by the grate.

"I had to come. I could not spend another night without knowing where I could get help."

"Write to your mother, Paul."

"There isn't time. Sidney may want his book at any moment, or want me to get money for him, and then he'll find it's not there. Oh, Deb, do help me get it back! I'll get it for you again; mother'll send me money when she finds I must have it, and I'll pay it all back to you."

"How much is it?" Deborah asked, her voice more quiet, but a red spot glowing in each of her cheeks.

"A hundred and fifty."

"A hundred and fifty! Why, I couldn't get you so much without somebody knowing what I wanted to do with it!" And unconsciously Deb drew a breath of relief that even the power of doing had been taken from her.

"But half of it, Deb! You certainly could

get half of it, and I can get some, maybe, from Uncle Avery."

"I could not get a third of it without being asked what it was for. Girls don't have fifty dollar bills tossed at them for incidentals and cigars. I have what I want, because I want what I need; but I generally tell Mr. Avery what I need it for—that is, the big sums."

"But say you'll try, Deb!" begged Paul, rising.

"Do go to Mr. Avery and make a clean breast of it."

"I never will. I'll run away. I'll cut where they never'll hear from me again. I could never face the folks with it."

And looking at the boy shrinking and cowering before her, showing no sign that he possessed one grain of manliness, Deborah did not know as he could face the result of his misdoing, with all the better part of his nature run to waste. And even while despising him, she thought of Maybelle and her eyes filled with tears. How quickly Maybelle would reach to give him aid, were it in her power!

"Do you suppose," Deborah said, turning and facing Paul in her straightforward way, "that if you should creep out from under this, it would cure you of your silliness? Is there any hope of your turning?"

"Oh, Deb, if I only could be given the chance!" He laid his arm upon the mantel, and dropping his face upon it, broke into tears.

"Well, I'll try in the morning. But I haven't a particle of hope," said Deborah.

"Oh, Deb, I never will forget!" cried Paul.

Deb drew back. The sudden bounding up of the boy's spirits brought back her old dislike.

"Time enough for a scene when I've done anything," she said curtly, walking toward the door.

"But when will you let me know?"

"You can watch for me as I go along in the morning; but I sha'n't get it." It was comforting to Paul, though, to know that she was going to try.

Deborah went to her room. She could not study, could not go to bed, even, but sat looking into the fire in an aimless way, and wondering how anyone could be so mean and so cowardly as Paul Greyson.

"Has anyone been here, Hannah?" Mrs. Avery asked, as a little after ten the family returned, bringing plenty of cold air and a very sleepy little boy.

"Only Mr. Paul to see Miss Deborah."

"To see Deb?" said Genevieve; "that's queer. I never knew them to speak a civil word to each other."

"He probably came to see some of us, and there was no one else at home," said Maybelle.

"I wouldn't have thought she'd see him," said Genevieve.

"She said she wouldn't, when he first asked for her," answered Hannah, taking off Benny's wraps.

"Queer he should ask for her," mused Genie. "How long was he here?"

"Pretty near all the evening," replied Hannah, bearing off the sleeping boy.

"Don't you think it's queer, mamma?" Genevieve said, standing a little later by her mother's dressing table. "Paul's been here all the evening with Deb."

"But there was no one else here," said Mrs. Avery.

"But he asked for her. I inquired of Hannah just now in the kitchen if he asked for any one of us, and she said no; he just asked if Miss Deb was in. There must be something in the wind."

"Well, I wouldn't bother my head with trying to find out everything, Genie," said her mother, anxious to check her daughter's suspicious way, especially concerning those for whom she had no love.

But as Mrs. Avery stood before her mirror, she caught herself wondering what Deborah and Paul had found of common interest. Remembering that Deb had not seemed well, she went in to see how she was likely to fare for the night, and found her still up. When Deb said nothing concerning Paul's having been there, Mrs. Avery wondered again, and then set it down to "Deborah's way."

"Mr. Avery," said Deborah the next morning, following her guardian into the library, "can I have a little more money?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so; I have never had any orders to the contrary;" and he reached for his pocketbook.

Deb drew a sigh of relief. Not that the getting of money had ever been very difficult, but she was glad the present ordeal was likely to be gotten over with no questions asked.

"How much shall it be this time?" asked Mr. Avery.

Seeing the thick roll of bills from which he was selecting, Deb grew bold and said, "I should like seventy-five—" And then, seeing a shade of surprise pass over Mr. Avery's face, added, "Maybe fifty will do."

"Why, Deb, girl, aren't you getting extravagant?" he asked kindly. "But I suppose it is Christmas time."

"Yes," said Deborah, blushing deeply as she realized that she was giving the impression that the money was for a Christmas gift.

"But does Mrs. Avery know what you intend doing with this?"

"No, sir," said Deb faintly.

"Do you not think it would be better to consult with her first? I would hardly like Maybelle or Genevieve to spend so much without advising with anyone; and I think your father expects that I will do with his money and his child about as I would with my own."

The confusion in Deb's manner, so different from anything he had ever seen when she asked for money—as she had from time to time all through her stay with them, though generally not in large sums—made Mr. Avery feel that all was not just clear sailing.

Deb turned abruptly from him.

"Deborah, if you will speak to Mrs. Avery

and she says it's all right, the money's here."

But only with a "Never mind!" did Deb answer, as she hurried away.

Mr. Avery felt uncomfortable; as soon as Deborah had gone upstairs he sought his wife.

"Have you any idea, Kate, what Deb wants seventy-five dollars for?"

"Goodness, no!"

"She isn't going to do anything foolish for our Christmas, is she?"

"She must not be allowed to, if she has such a thought," said Mrs. Avery. "She has spent more money for the girls now than I wish."

"Well, don't say I mentioned it. Perhaps it's just a whim that we'll hear no more about."

Deb walked moodily away to school. At the corner near the academy she found Paul waiting. He seemed to read the news before she came up with him.

"So you haven't got it? How could you have failed!" and his face showed his bitter disappointment.

"I told you how it would be. He wouldn't let me have it unless I told him or someone what I wanted it for. Oh, Paul, do go to Mr. Avery!"

"I tell you, I won't; I'll drown myself first!" and he walked sullenly away.

That night, as Deb made her way home from school, she came upon Paul at the corner near the Downings', and another short talk followed as they passed along—the boy urging, the girl protesting. At last, as they neared the house, Paul said:

"You'll be sorry all your life if you don't. You never wear it, anyway, and I'd only get part of the money on it and redeem it in a little while. Oh, Deb, please don't fail me!"

"But suppose it should be missed?"

"It won't be; do let me have it!"

Never in all her life had Deborah Gibbs done anything underhanded, and now her whole soul rebelled at helping Paul in such a way as he proposed.

"Paul, I can't do it. My father never gave it to me for any such purpose. He'd never trust me again if he should find it out—or the Averys either; I won't soil my fingers doing it!"

"Well, it's got to go, then—there's no help for it;" and Paul turned from her, muttering something she did not hear.

Only by snatches did Deb sleep that night. But the next morning the fire in her face had died down, leaving it worn and haggard.

At a quarter before nine, a young girl in brown jacket and cap might have been seen standing on the steps of the Lawrence Academy, asking for Paul Greyson. It was Deborah, and as Paul came to her she dropped a small box into his hand, and, hardly waiting for his thanks, turned and went down the steps. It was her birthday gift of the year previous that she had left with him—a ring, concerning which her father had written her, at the time he purchased it at a bargain from a man who was obliged to sell it, that it was "worth money," and "she could know as how it was as good, and hold her head up 'longside o' the best of 'em when she had it on,"—a ring holding one diamond, a jewel rather too costly for a schoolgirl, as Deborah had been made to understand by wise Mrs. Avery. Upon only one or two occasions had it been worn.

Deborah went to school feeling miserable. Although Paul's words of thanks were fresh in her ears, her conscience failed to give sanction to what her hand had done.

The Christmas jubilee for Deborah that year fell flat. She tried to rally, tried to keep her usual self-possession about her; but often she would start, paling and flushing, when those around her saw no cause. More than one wondered what had come over the girl.

But as the merrymaking of the holidays glided by, and things settled into their old routine again, Deb conquered herself and grew more at ease; or, rather, the slipping by of the weeks without discovery of the ring's not being in her possession made her feel more confidence as to its all coming out right. Besides, each day made the dread less, for each day it seemed to her more likely the ring would be brought back and slipped into its old place.

Deborah began to look daily now for Paul to come with the ring. But no Paul came. Once she saw him, but it was at an evening gathering, and there was no chance to speak to him; but seeing him look his old self again, she drew a breath of relief. It must be all right now, or he could not look like that—and she longed for the touch of the jewel which she was now so sure Paul had safe in his keeping again.

CHAPTER XXV.

WHAT CAME OF HELPING A COWARD.

IT WAS the night of an evening gathering at Mrs. Avery's. The parlors were well filled, and, though not yet released from school, the three young girls flitted among the guests, many of whom were well known to them—a trio well appreciated by the hostess in her duties of entertaining. It was late in the evening, refreshments were at an end, and, a little wearied, Deborah sat leaning against the window, half absorbed by the gay scene around her, and, half-unconsciously, thinking of other things.

Sitting there, the ruby trimming of her dress contrasting with the cream tints of the window drapery back of her, her fingers toying with the roses at her belt, she became conscious of a conversation which was being carried on almost at her elbow.

"A daughter of our host?" the gentleman was asking of a little lady in cream satin, beside him, who was none other than Mrs. Thaddeus Downing.

"A ward. Been with them for several years. True gold."

Then the two drifted away, and their places

were soon filled by another couple, the hostess and an old friend—well-nigh a brother—whom she had not seen for several years.

"Your girls are creeping up fast," the gentleman said, with his glance upon Genevieve, who stood at the further end of the room talking animatedly, and looking her very best. "How different the two are—Genevieve brilliant, and Maybelle so delicately pure. I almost envy you, Kate."

"But you know, George, you always were a trifle partial to fresh girl-beauty," answered Mrs. Avery, smiling. And then she asked, with a glance in Deborah's direction:

"What think you of our new possession?"

"I have only seen her at a distance," said Mr. Alling.

Deborah felt a hand upon her arm, turned, and rising, Mr. Alling was presented by Mrs. Avery. For a moment Deb joined in the conversation, and then, as it drifted into channels unfamiliar to her, she stood with her arm resting on the couch back of Mrs. Avery, and again began idly watching the throng, hearing nothing more of what the two were saying. Had she been listening to their words, had she heard Mr. Alling as he said, "I am having Alice's diamonds reset for her," had she heard Mrs. Avery's remark upon their remembered beauty, she might not have been so startled, might not have had the color swept from her cheeks so suddenly, when Mrs. Avery asked:

"Have you your ring on to-night, Deborah?"

As it was, when the question came, bringing so suddenly a sickening wave of the old apprehension, Deborah stood white and startled, then opened her lips to speak—closed them—partially regained herself, and stammered, "I haven't it on."

Mrs. Avery gave a look of surprise, then in turn checked herself, remembering where she was, and, passing the affair off as well as possible, bore the gentleman away.

Half-hidden by the window-draperies, Deborah stood and tried to face it. What if after her weeks of tedious bearing, it should all come out finally! Oh, why had Paul not brought it back! If only she had had it this night all would have been well. What if he never brought it back? As this thought flashed upon her, she covered her face for a moment with her hand. Looking up, she saw Mrs. Avery's eyes fixed upon her from the opposite side of the room—for the first time in all those years, in doubt and distrust. She tried to rally, tried to stop thinking, to make the color in her face die down, and to be her calm self; but it was impossible.

Somehow—Deborah never just remembered how—the rest of the evening was gotten through, and before the dresser in her own room she stood tossing off the pretty costume she had put on so light-heartedly.

Soon there came the knock she was expecting, but for which she was not ready. Not one idea had she as to what she should do, now that it had come.

Mrs. Avery's soft hand was laid upon the girl's shoulder, and Mrs. Avery's dear eyes looked down—Deb knew it, though she did not glance up—and still she was not ready. But before Mrs. Avery found words, Deb, well-nigh beside herself, threw up her head like a hunted animal.

"Don't ask me a word about it! Give me time to think." And hardly conscious of what she was saying, she added: "I shall have it back safe again, and it will all be over."

"But my dear child—"

"Don't, oh, don't, I beg you!" she said, turning away and dropping her head upon her hands.

A full minute Mrs. Avery stood in silence. Then she said in a way so sorrowful as to send her words like a knife through Deb's tortured heart:

"It is the first time that a cloud has rested between us, Deborah. Must I lie down with it there?"

Only a sob came from the girl in answer. A moment later Deborah heard the door gently close, and knew her guardian angel had taken flight.

"But Kate," said Mr. Avery, when in the privacy of their own room Mrs. Avery made known the present trouble, "I'm afraid Deb's not taking just the right course. She has acted a little constrained ever since I refused her that seventy-five dollars. Then I don't quite like her taking so to Paul; it shows a lack of good sense."

"But I don't think they have ever seen much of each other."

"I don't know as they have. But though I did not say anything at the time, that very night he was here spending the evening with her—the night Genevieve wondered so—I saw them straying off among the shrubbery of the park together, and a morning or two after she was at the academy to see him."

"Why, Jansen! Why didn't you tell me?"

"Nothing to tell, as I know of—only it shows that Deb is not just open with us."

"But how came you to know of her being at the academy?"

"Why, Professor Cameron and I were at lunch together that day, and he was speaking of the wonderful improvement in Deborah, and it came out that he had seen her on the steps talking with Paul."

"Oh, dear! Why must girls, just as soon as they are grown, be such responsibilities!" sighed Mrs. Avery.

"Well, don't you go to getting fretted over it! But I shall be provoked enough if Deb has lost that ring. Her father should never have given it to her in the first place."

"It isn't lost, and that's the worst of it; she speaks of getting it back again."

"Well, let it rest for to-night. It will have to be seen to, though," said her husband.

Neither Deb nor Mrs. Avery slept much that night, and both rose with temples throbbing and nerves unstrung. Mrs. Avery went to the breakfast-table in a despondent, rather dis-

couraged mood; Deb in an apprehensive, defiant one.

Mr. Avery noticed the look of care upon his wife's face and felt annoyed; and then, glancing at the fortified expression on Deb's, he felt still more annoyed. A half-hour later, meeting Deborah just starting out with her books, he said:

"Deborah,"—not impatiently, but rather as though he meant business—"you expect to clear up this affair of the ring before long, don't you?"

Then, seeing no sign of a reply, he added: "You know we do not expect to indulge you in underhanded things, any more than we do our own girls."

The word "underhanded" was torture to Deb's proud spirit.

"You have no right to distrust me so! You might know it was something that I was not responsible for."

"But you certainly are responsible for that ring. You know its value."

"I wish to goodness I was a poor girl!—that I hadn't a cent! that I dressed in rags and calico." And out Deb bolted, slamming the door after her.

Mr. and Mrs. Avery, after a long consultation, reached the conclusion that the best way was to say nothing more for the present, but to keep as careful guard over Deborah as they could, so that if tempted to any more false steps she might be deterred.

Poor Deb! In spite of all their efforts to the contrary, she felt herself in consequence not only mistrusted, but watched. Turn where she might, she felt the matter of the ring was a subject of wonder to the whole household. The girls, having been questioned by their parents, daily showed their knowledge of the present state of things, and this was the last feather's weight. Worst of all, Deb saw nothing of Paul, or nothing that promised the bringing back of her ring. She saw him, but he was always surrounded by gay companions, or driving swiftly down the street. But he never saw her—or pretended not to; Deb could not tell which. At last the thread of patience snapped, and Paul in consequence received the following note one morning:

Paul Greyson: I will give you just twenty-four hours to bring my ring back, or tell the whole.
DEBORAH GIBBS.

And this Paul read with his rollicking companions around him, but all they heard was an exclamation of disgust as he turned on his heel and left them. That night Deborah took a new route home from school, and thus avoided Paul, who was, as she divined, waiting for her.

Paul was in his old "pushed" state again, with the ring as far from being redeemed as on the day when it had been given to the pawnbroker, and little in his pocket save the ticket he held for it. And now here was Deb threatening, and Paul felt sure, by the tenor of her note and her avoidance of him, that the girl meant what she threatened.

That evening just before the streets were lighted, there was a slight ring at the Averys' door.

"Hannah," said a low voice, "ask Miss Deborah to step here a minute. Don't let any of the others know, please."

Deb came eagerly down the stairs.

"Oh, Paul, give it to me quick!" she said, stretching out her hand.

"But I haven't it! I haven't had money enough to get it. You've got to wait and give me a chance."

"I can't wait," said Deb bitterly. "It's half out now."

Here a hand was laid on the door from within.

"Why do you keep the door open, children? Come in and do your talking;" and Mr. Avery threw back the door.

Paul muttered something about not needing to come in, but, seeming not to dare to refuse, followed Deborah into the hall.

As soon as the light fell upon the faces of the two before him, Mr. Avery saw something was amiss.

"What is it all about, anyway, children?" he said a trifle impatiently.

He was so weary with the doings of this scapegrace nephew of his, who had caused him any amount of trouble since his mother's departure, and was likely, so far as he could see, to cause him a vast amount more, that he was not likely to overlook anything like stolen interviews with Paul on the part of Deborah. As neither seemed inclined to answer what he asked, he said a little sharply:

"You two seem to have a great deal in common of late—what about, is a mystery to Mrs. Avery and myself. I should think, Deborah—"

"You need not go to classing me with him!" broke in Deb, her face showing something of the anger that raged within, now that she found Paul had made no move toward getting the ring.

Mr. Avery looked from Deb to Paul, and then back to Deb again.

"What is it all about?"

"You just wait till the twenty-four hours are up, and I'll tell you!" said the girl, setting her teeth hard.

"Deborah, has this anything to do with the other trouble?" asked Mr. Avery, a swift flash of light breaking through the darkness. "Paul,"—and Mr. Avery pushed his nephew through the parlor door that stood open near—"if you know anything about Deborah's diamond ring, speak up!" and he laid his hand on Deb's shoulder as she turned as though to escape from the room. As Mr. Avery saw Paul stand shrinking and cowering, while Deb's eyes rained a shower of vindictive flashes, he added: "I will get at the truth of this thing. I shall have no more beating around the bush. I will know what this all means, and so shall Mrs. Avery." And summoning the maid, he asked that Mrs. Avery and the girls be sent to the parlor.

When the three came, he said: "Now, Deb,

there is not one here but has known for a long time that something was wrong. I am convinced that this trouble between you and Paul has something to do with the ring. You will now please see that a clean breast is made of it all."

Thus driven to bay, Deb stood with eyes fixed upon the boy, who had dropped into a seat by the window. Did he know the eyes of the girl were upon him? At last Deb made a step forward and laid her hand in no gentle way upon his shoulder, and giving him a half-thrust, said:

"Will you speak? Or must I drag the thing out before your very eyes?"

"Paul, what is the meaning of this? Speak up like a man! You shall be given fair play."

"Fair play!" said Deborah. "As though he had not been having fair play for weeks, while I have been waiting for him to show one shadow of a manly trait!"

"Paul," said Mr. Avery sternly, "you must speak. I am convinced that Deborah's ring is at the bottom of this, and you shall tell concerning it."

"But, Uncle Avery, I did so need money—"

"Need money! You don't tell me that you laid hold of that ring to square yourself!" cried Mr. Avery, his face growing fairly rigid in its sternness.

"But, uncle, you don't know how I was pushed."

"Paul Greyson, what have you done with that ring?"

"It's there," said Paul, taking out the pawn ticket from his vest pocket. "Oh, Deb, do tell them! I can't."

"She shall not!" said Mr. Avery. "She has had bother and trouble enough out of this." And as he saw Deborah stand with heaving breast, making a brave effort to keep down the torrent which surged within her, he took a step forward and folded her in his arms. Upon his shoulder the girl wept the first tears of her release.

"There, wife, take her," he said, as Mrs. Avery, with tears running down her face, crossed to the two. "I'm afraid it's a sorry road we've all been leading her."

He turned, and, drawing forth his handkerchief, cleared his voice. Pillowed in Mrs. Avery's lap, with Maybelle down beside her, Deborah cried on.

"Now, Paul, if you'll begin, we will listen to you," said his uncle.

There was a sternness in the voice that seemed to admit of no parleying, and Paul evidently felt it.

"Uncle Avery, I can't do it! I can't tell it, with Genie and all the rest here."

"You shall release Deborah from every shadow of blame that you have been the means of bringing upon her. She shall stand again in as irreproachable a light as before you waylaid her for help," said Mr. Avery.

And so before them all Paul Greyson was made to tell his tale. And when he showed the least indication of circumventing, Deborah's head was raised as though in protest, at which would come from the uncle:

"No flinching, Paul!"

In that moment Paul Greyson knew the exact measure of a coward, and those listening to him knew it too. When the story was told, Mr. Avery stood with set features looking down upon him. But Genevieve sprang as though stung to the quick; whatever Genevieve was not, she was out-and-out honest.

"He shall never be owned again by me as a relative to the longest day I live!" she exclaimed, with quivering nostrils, as she turned to leave the room.

Paul started up as though to detain his cousin, but Mr. Avery laid his hand upon him.

"Paul, I give you the choice between two things: either to go to Sidney Cutter and make a full confession of having tampered with his bank book, and obtain his forgiveness, promising to start upon an entirely new track; or to take the first train to your mother. I cannot have the responsibility of you unless you pledge yourself to take the right course."

"I'll go to mother," sobbed Paul.

"Very well," said Mr. Avery, as the boy moved toward the door.

"Oh, Paul!" cried Maybelle starting up, and with wide eyes and a startled face throwing her arms around her cousin, "don't leave it hanging this way! Do clear the matter up, and start fair and square again! You'll be sorry all your life if you don't."

Though Paul's lips quivered, he showed no other sign of being moved, and, shaking himself free, made a rush for the hall.

Mr. Avery followed him, and in a kinder tone tried to persuade the youth to do the fair thing, assuring him that Sidney would be likely to overlook the wrong if the confession was freely made. But the door closed upon Paul without his giving any indication of an intention to follow the advice.

For some moments Mr. Avery stood with his back toward the others.

"Nothing but sorrow for Mary in that boy, I'm afraid," he said at last; but as he turned and saw his wife wiping the traces of tears from her face, he continued, "I think we all need dinner, wife."

Deborah rose, and Mr. Avery stretched out his hand to her.

"You meant well, my child, but it would have been better by far to come directly to Mrs. Avery with it. Have no secrets from her as long as you are beneath this roof. Promise me this, Deborah, or I fear I shall never feel easy concerning you again. A girl—almost a young lady—of whom it is known that money by the thousands is at her disposal, as it will be known as the years creep on, needs a careful and wise adviser, and such a one you will find in this little mother of ours every time. Will you promise me, Deborah? Then I shall feel at ease about you again."

"I begged him to go to you all the time, but he just wouldn't," said Deborah.

"You are a dear, kind friend to us all," said Mrs. Avery.

"If it hadn't been for her, the whole thing would have been known," said Genevieve, who had now re-entered the room, and who certainly looked with more kindly glances upon Deb than ever before.

"I can only think of his poor mother," said Mr. Avery, turning at the announcement of dinner. And from that time the subject was never again mentioned by Mr. Avery.

But there was a lingering tenderness in his manner toward Deborah—in fact, in the manner of his wife as well, and of Maybelle—as though she had been absent from them a long time and they had her safe back again; a way of speaking softly to her, and bestowing a caress when no one was by to notice, that fell like healing balm upon the torn spirit of Deborah, moving her as she had never been moved before. Easily was she moved to tears these days, as a child who has strayed from home and lost its way is tender-hearted when again home is found—a home all the dearer when contrasted with the dangers past.

When, one evening, Mr. Avery, coming in late and meeting Deborah at the foot of the stairs, dropped a little box into her hand, she knew at once that it was her ring; but she had not the slightest wish to look upon it. Silently she passed up the stairs, and, opening her jewel-box, unlocked an inner case and laid it therein, turning the key upon it.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DAN.

"I DON'T believe it's any use, Dorm, our coming."

"You mustn't say that, Dan," said the one addressed, rearranging the pillows underneath Dan's head. "You must just wait until you taste the salt air, and see the water breaking at your feet."

"But, Dorm—" And the blue eyes, filled with mute entreaty, were fixed upon the other's face.

"No, no, lad! You mustn't say that," and the eyes of the older brother grew dark with pain. "I can't bear to even hear you hint at it, Dan." And Dorman Deering turned his face outward and gazed through the car window upon the summer landscape past which they were flashing.

"But, Dorm?"

"Yes, lad."

"Wouldn't it be better to get kind o' used to it before it came—if it had to come?"

"Dan, don't!" and Dorman rose and, striding through the car, went out upon the platform and let the wind blow full upon his face—such a weary, haggard face that it made the blue eyes back in the car fill with tears.

For four days these two had journeyed thus together, and many were the curious glances turned toward the picture of the fair-haired boy and the tenderly-strong man. But the two had eyes only for each other, and the thoughts of both were in the same place.

But not a hint that time and change would fail to cure his brother's sickness would Dorman allow in his presence. And here was where Dan's trouble lay.

In the glow of the evening sun the two reached the cottage at the seaside where the Averys were already domiciled, and where Daniel had been invited as soon as it was known he was ailing.

As Dan felt his brother's arms removed from under him, and his glance swept the little group pressing to give him welcome, and then falling back at sight of the change sickness had wrought in the lad, he read the confirmation of what he had long believed, and looked around to see if at last his brother was convinced.

But Dorman had turned his back upon the group, and was gazing from the window as though he could not bear the sight of the shock which he knew his brother's face must give.

Deborah was not in the room at the time of their coming. A little later she entered with a glad light of welcome on her face. She half crossed the room before fully catching sight of Dan. Then she stopped, stood a moment with lips parted, a look of sudden fear creeping to her eyes, and with a low cry turned and fled from the room.

"Oh, Dorm, go and call her back!" cried Dan pleadingly.

But his brother did not stir.

"Never mind, Dan," said Mrs. Avery, bending over him. "Just lie here and rest now, and try to show them all they are mistaken."

Over the sands Dorman saw Deborah stumble; saw her reach a sharp rock and round it.

Later, down in a heap far out on the beach he came upon her. At the sound of Dorman's voice, Deborah raised her head, showing a face swollen from weeping.

"Why couldn't you have brought him sooner?" she exclaimed, flashing her eyes almost angrily upon him. "Why did you need to keep him chained till the last moment, in a place he was never made for!"

"Deb, don't! I cannot bear it!" And Dorman turned his face out to where the waves were coming in great billows toward them, and strove to keep his features from working convulsively. As well might the waters breaking at his feet have thought to still themselves. The girl wept on drearily. The man strode to and fro near. At last he stopped, and looking down upon the weeping girl said, not unkindly, but with a voice weighted with sadness:

"Would it not have been kinder to tell me, Deb, than to let me go on making mistakes? Your mother says you knew, Deborah."

"Oh, Dorm, I never dreamed of this!" said the girl, jumping to her feet and laying her hand upon her companion's arm.

Dorman took the hand and stroked it as it

lay on his great palm, but not as though he were conscious of doing so.

"When Dan told me how sometimes he longed to tear himself away and go where it was easier, and that thinking of all that he must do in order to make a great man tired him, I never thought of this, Dorm — never dreamed that this could come."

"And why need it, Deb? Why need it come?" said the man, laying his hand so hard upon that of the girl as to hurt it unknowingly. "Do you think that if it should come, Deborah, I could bear it?" he asked wistfully.

The tears of the young girl were stayed, as, looking up bravely into the face of the one before her, she said:

"I think so, Dorm. For the sake of Dan, you know," she added, more softly.

"Yes, for the sake of Dan," he answered.

Then he turned and strode on down the beach, with the water curling up around his feet. For a while the girl stood and watched him, but as the gay after-supper throng came swarming from cottages and hotels, she made her way back to the cottage and gave Dan a tender greeting.

"Do you think he'll learn to bear it, Deb?" Dan said later, as he turned his face toward the girl beside him.

"Yes, for your sake, he says."

"I knew you'd help fix it, Deb;" and the boy turned contentedly upon his pillow and slept.

If Deborah had rather misled Dan as to his brother's resignation, he was never the wiser. From that time on, not by so much as a look did Dorman show that he would hold his brother back if he could. It was a great load lifted from the sick boy's mind.

"You see, Dorm, it was the only hard thing there was left," he said in one of their long talks there in the upper room of the cottage, with the water flashing before it. "But it's just like you, Dorm. You always made it easy for me—always. You never put a rough place in my life. You never spoke a word that hurt. If I'd been a baby all my life long, you could not have been more tender of me. But Dorm, you know I'd be glad to be with mother—somehow, for all your care of me, I've missed mother. I wonder why?"

"I don't know, lad, unless because you two are so nearly alike. Oh, Dan, maybe if I'd done more for her I'd have you both now."

"Don't, Dorm! You mustn't say that. You mustn't ever say that again. Some go, and all our love can't make them stay. I sometimes think it's just because the Father's love —the love that makes heaven golden—is so much the stronger and draws the hardest. And then, Dorm, there are some who tire easily, and maybe God sees they couldn't get to the top of things the way others do—sort of masterful, like your way and Deb's, you know —and so he takes them by a shorter cut. It will be beautiful there, Dorm—oh, so beautiful!" The boy's face was radiant with an inner glow. Then it paled a trifle as he added, and a touch of regret was in his tone, "I don't believe I could stand it to get it all, Dorm."

"All what?"

"Get all that makes a grand man such as you always seemed to think I'd be some day."

"And you would have been, Dan. You'd have been—oh, Dan!" And in that moment the storm-flood swept over the boundary of self-control, and Dorman laid his face in his hands and let his grief have sway. The boy shut his teeth hard, and closed his eyes that he might not see, but the bed was shaken by the sobs. At last the head was lifted and a repentant voice said:

"Dan, I didn't mean it. It's all right. It's beautiful up yonder—beautiful!" He drew a deep breath. "And you're more akin to those up there than to us down here—struggling, many of us, to reach things that sink to nothing when the test comes. You'll be better off. And you're a brave lad—a bonny brave lad," and the fair hair was brushed tenderly back from Dan's forehead. "From the very start you've been brave. You never said I tired you with my long strides; you just kept on doing your best to keep up, and held the cheer in your voice. But you'll get to the top first, Dan, and it's all right." Then he added in a stronger tone, as though to make his own heart take strength from the words: "It's all right, Dan."

And the tired boy, hearing him, drew a long, spent breath, and curling in the circle of his brother's arms, nestled close to his broad breast. The eyes dropped, and gradually a smile parted the lips as the lad slumbered.

But when the golden days were gone and Dan with them, when with the first chill of September flowers were heaped to hide the wound made in the green sod, the older brother looked around upon those who were standing so loyally with him, as though seeking for something he had thought to find but did not —strength to bear his loss. It was pitiful to see him strive to stand the blow and make no sign—to bear the weight and not be swayed by it.

Then it was that Deborah, even while her own heart was aching, put her grief aside to comfort Dorm. And she was a great help to him; the way her clear gaze went out to his unfalteringly steadied him, while the touch of her slender, wiry hand within his palm held an uplift for the lonely man.

In their last talk in the Avery home before Dorman's return to the mines, he said, speaking of the lad:

"I was so strong myself that I did not realize what a mite he was. Besides, his spirit was such a great one it misled me as to his strength. I set him too fast a pace, and tired him with my great hopes for the coming days. And he was so plucky, he fooled me. Likely as not, I should have gone on making mistakes, Deb. But he is safe now. After all, when you think of what life is, it's a great

comfort to remember that for all time Dan is safe."

"Yes, and glad," responded the girl. "We'll just keep on by the longer road, and as we climb, keep glad." Then she added half to herself, "With our eyes on the heights." Seeing that Dorman had overheard, she smiled and said, "That, Mr. Avery says, is the true way to climb—standing straight, with eyes on the heights."

"And it is the way Dan climbed," said the other. "Though he talked little about it, his eyes were on the heights. He's at the top now, Deb."

"Yes," answered the girl softly.

CHAPTER XXVII.

RED TOP AHEAD.

IT IS Genevieve's and Deb's graduating day—a rare day in June—and skies and birds and blooming parks seem to have caught an inspiration to do honor to the occasion.

"I wish that it was over," says Maybelle from her place in the broad window, ready even to placing on her head the pale blue hat, as she idly watches the two graduates-elect give the last touch to their apparel.

"And pray, what is it to you?" says Genevieve, slowly turning before the mirror.

"A good deal, I'd have you know. I expect to faint for you, and when that's through, faint again for Deb."

"And what will you do when your time comes to graduate?"

"Run off to Europe or somewhere—papa and I have it all arranged."

"Do you hear that, Deb?" Genie calls to Deborah, who is in the adjoining room.

"What is it?" and Deb makes her appearance.

"Maybelle has arranged a European trip when her time comes to graduate."

"She does not need to order her traveling dress yet," declares Deb.

"There, Deb, let us have no reference to my standing; give me one delicious day of peace." And Maybelle jumps up to make use of the unoccupied mirror and see if everything about her is exactly right. It is a pretty costume of clinging crape of palest blue, with evening wrap of the same, and hat to match. Satisfied with the survey, Maybelle turns her thoughts upon the white-robed figures by her side.

"I shall have the satisfaction of being proud of your looks, at any rate," she says, holding back the window lace to make the light stronger.

"If we don't cry and spoil it all."

The curtain falls from Maybelle's hand.

"Whatever should I do, girls, if you did burst into tears when your turn came!"

"Run up with a handkerchief, of course," says Deb.

Just here Mrs. Avery looks in solicitously, and Deborah's mother in gray silk follows, and then the happy girls gather up their gloves and flowers and flit away.

"If only you both came first!" sighs Maybelle, leaning back in the carriage. "I could then have it all over in time to enjoy the remainder; but I've got to hold my breath all through your performances, and keep it hanging till the very last flower is thrown for Deb."

"Suppose we didn't get a flower?" Genie suggests.

"We might have hired a boy," says Deb.

"Well, I did tell Sidney Cutter he must bring a heap for you, Deb. I could as well as not, as long as you're not one of our family," Maybelle replies.

"If I thought you had!" exclaims Deborah.

"It's only her nonsense," replies Genevieve.

"I told him. If he does not do it, that's not my fault," persists Maybelle in her pretty, innocent fashion, breaking into dimples as she laughs.

Very happy is Maybelle, so sure is she, notwithstanding all her light words to the contrary, that the two she loves so dearly will do their very best—and their best is good enough for anyone, according to her thinking.

From platform to balcony the room is filled when the white-robed graduates take the seats waiting for them. As soon as seated, Genevieve sweeps her eye over the audience, and in doing so singles out Maybelle at once—but then, Maybelle is rather easily singled out, with the blue hat resting against her fluffy yellow hair. As her eye roves on, Genevieve smiles a recognition here and there from over her fluttering fan. But Deborah, from her place near the aisle, does not turn to meet the faces around her. Seeing this, Maybelle wonders if Deb is going to be frightened. The orchestra begins, and attention is claimed.

Genevieve bears herself well. She is a self-sustained, self-appreciative sort of person, who stands much higher with the public surrounding her little school-world than with her daily companions. Many times during the past years she has helped to provide entertainment for nearly this same audience; she is known to them and they to her. The very way that, on this farewell occasion, she steps upon the stage when going through her part of the program, shows that she knows what is expected of her; the way she steps off it, that she is sure she has not fallen below their expectations.

As the program nears completion, and Deborah realizes that her time has come, she throws her head slightly back, like a war-horse scenting a fray he is in no wise afraid to enter. As her theme and name are spoken, she fills her lungs with a long-drawn breath, and rising, moves with a straight, gliding motion towards the stage. Thaddeus Downing rubs his hands in delight behind the railing of the balcony; but then, Thaddeus always was a trifle partial concerning Deborah's walk.

As with a slight inclination of the head Deborah turns her face toward the audience, a low under-swell of applause starts from among her schoolfellows, is caught up elsewhere, gathers strength, and breaks in a sparkling dash over her. With parted lips she stands ready to begin. But as the applause rolls over her, she pauses, flashes an appreciative look upon her audience and another upon her mates, and quietly settles down to her task.

A dark-haired man a few seats back of Mr. Downing places his elbow upon the arm of his chair and shades his face with his hand as she proceeds. Is it to hide his deep solicitude? Perhaps, for it is Dorman Deering. Deborah Gibbs is one who attempts less than some, but in what she attempts to do, she allows no one to excel her. Concentrated effort is the secret power of many a success, and it is in great measure the secret of Deborah's. Many times she has used it like a magic key to unlock things considered unattainable by the majority of her comrades. There is a pent-up eagerness showing itself back of her first quietly-spoken words that draws her listeners into attention at the very beginning; an expectant attention, as though something more was looked for. And gradually it comes leaping and sparkling to the surface. The dark face grows eager and interested, the gray eyes purple with feeling, and the breath comes quick and fast. Gaining with the progress of her theme, more and more freedom, at last the speaker sends down upon her audience a shower of pearl-like thoughts that for the time being holds them as if spellbound.

A moment she pauses, and the gap is quickly filled by another round of applause. She bends her head as though to let it pass, then, turning towards her comrades, enters upon her farewell words. Hearing her then, as with voice freighted with feeling she lightly touches the retrospect of their school-life, one learns something of what these past days of labor have been to Deborah Gibbs, and one sighs that such earnest workers are so few and rare. Many a schoolmate's eye moistens as Deborah proceeds, and many a grave professor feels a wave of regret that this hour severs his connection with this pupil.

At last the final word dies away, and as the audience draws a long breath, a bed of flowers is planted at Deborah's feet. Half turning on her way from the platform, she stops and makes a low bow of acknowledgment. In doing so she picks up a bunch of roses lying at her feet, and as she passes to her seat throws them to a little man in black in the first tier of seats. It is her father.

"Red Top's ahead!" cries Thaddeus, under cover of the applause, to Bertha, all smiles and tears, at his side. "But then, I knew she would be—not another girl like her." And he nods exultantly to Mr. Deering, who has taken down his hand, and is just then thinking, "Kept her word and gone straight to the top of things!"

And so thinks the little man in black down among the first seats; but then, probably he all along has "'lowed as how she would."

Mrs. Avery is very happy; and so is Mrs. Gibbs, there by her husband's side, enjoying the flowers Deborah had tossed to them. And Maybelle—loving, self-forgetful Maybelle—is so deliciously satisfied as to be nearly beside herself; but she tries to hide her exuberance of delight under cover of teasing Sidney Cutter, who has a place beside her as usual, and affirms that "she knows it's his bouquet Deborah threw away."

When Deborah had dressed for the closing festivities that night, she unlocked an inner case of her jewel-box and took from it a ring, well-nigh too small for her. As she saw it flashing in the gaslight, there was awakened no feeling of resentment toward the one who had made its earlier associations distasteful, but only pity for the boy who even then was paying the penalty of deeper crimes. And as she saw her mother looking through her wardrobe, so curiously pleased with what she found, and murmuring from time to time her wonder at "the many things money could buy," Deborah thought, glancing from her mother to the ring upon her finger, of a broken-hearted mother whose death had been hastened by the deeds of her own son.

Years have gone by. In a room of a house upon a mountain terrace sits a young woman bending before an easel. Upon her hair the south sun lays its golden hand, and over the easel the worker bends absorbedly. There is a footstep behind her, and the one before the easel leans back. As a man enters and stands with his hand upon her chair, she lifts her head, and looking up to him, says:

"Is all there that I can put into it, Dorm?"

Dorman Deering looks long and searchingly upon the picture. It is that of a fair-faced boy seated upon a rock in a wild cleft of the mountain. The wind sweeps the soft hair out from under a torn straw hat, and there is a look of appeal upon his delicate features as he reaches his hand down to a young girl standing just below with her arms extended toward him. The girl's back is toward them, and all that is visible is a worn fur cap, a straight, lithe form, and feet bare to the ankles.

"It is the little lad himself—little Dan back again," Dorman says in a low, tender tone, and then adds:

"I wish the girl's face was toward us!"

"But it wasn't much of a face in those days, Dorm," says the other, looking down as a rosy flush creeps into her cheeks.

"But the dearest face in all the world to me now, Deb." And placing his palm beneath the round chin, he raises the face and leaves a kiss upon it. For four weeks she has been his wife.

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